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The Curious
Adventures of a
Field Cricket

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THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER I.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT MYSELF—MY CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.

I EXPERIENCE some embarrassment in beginning this tale. In conformity with ordinary usage I must introduce myself to the reader, talk about myself, say a word or two about my appearance and my character. Now in talking about yourself it is very difficult to maintain a happy medium. If you assume an air of modesty, you are supposed to be fishing for compliments; but if you go to the other extreme, you are set down as foppish, vain, and presumptuous, which is still worse. To avoid this double danger, I have decided on a course which I think will please everybody. I shall describe neither my figure nor my features. Sensible folks who write their memoirs, their travels, or their adventures, are in the habit of giving their portraits, a plan I have adopted above.

In the first place, and as is only natural, a reader likes to be familiar with the features of an author who, in a more or less considerable number of pages, is to confide to him his feelings of dread or of enthusiasm—in a word, all the emotions of his soul. For instance, when your author says, 'I was amazed,' 'I was struck dumb with terror,' 'I was convulsed with laughter,' or uses other similar expressions, it is pleasant to be able to imagine the changes successively produced in his features by amazement, terror, or wild mirth. To own the truth, I have a pretty good opinion of my personal appearance; but for all that, I assure you I give you my portrait for the reasons already stated, not from any silly feeling of vanity. This matter settled, I beg leave to relate as briefly as



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possible the story of my childhood and the causes which led to my adventures.

I never knew my parents. This is the case with almost all insects. When we are born our parents are already dead, and have sometimes been dead a long time, so that the expression 'spoiled child' could never be used in connection with any of us. You must not therefore jump to the conclusion that our parents launch us into life without caring what becomes of us. O, no; very far from that. Few have any idea how great is the solicitude of parents for their offspring in our world, or what self-denial, what devotion, is met with in every stage of our existence.

My earliest recollections go back a long way. I did not become suddenly conscious of life, and my notions on the delicate question of my origin are very confused. Ransacking the depths of my memory to the utmost, I dimly recall the following facts.

I found myself shut up in a very cramped position in a kind of oblong box, with my limbs folded up and pressed against my body. How long I had been in this strange situation, how I got there, and why I was there, were all equally incomprehensible to me. The wish to make myself more comfortable led me to try and turn round, and the result of this effort was that my box split from top to bottom. The first moment of surprise over, I ventured to push one foot through the newly-made opening, then a second, then a third. The opening became wider. Growing bolder by degrees, I put out my head, and at last my whole body was free.

I now found myself in a kind of tiny vault only lighted by a narrow crack in the ceiling. Instinctively I longed to reach the

luminous point, and I endeavoured by fresh exertions to enlarge the opening through which the light reached me. It was a long and painful task, which resulted, however, in complete success. I reached the surface of the ground. When the rays of the sun first fell on me I was very much dazzled and also inexpressibly delighted. After stretching my limbs one after the other, I looked around. The view was very extensive. A kind of escarpment of earth enclosed a small space, where crowds of little creatures like myself were moving about. These young crickets made up my family; they were my brothers and sisters, who, like myself, had just come out of the egg.

We were born in a kind of shallow excavation surrounded by a perpendicular escarpment, probably the result of the pressure of a stone which had formerly rested there. Each of us had scooped out a little grotto for himself in the escarpment, and the flat central square served as a general meeting-place. The desire to extend our field of action, however, soon led us to pierce a passage, by means of which we could go beyond the bounds of our common home, and sometimes alone or in small parties we went for walks or indulged in a little music in the open air.

One evening—it was in the month of May—tempted by the mildness of the atmosphere, we left our residence in a body. The moon was shining brightly, the air was laden with the most exquisite scents, and a thin bluish vapour rising from the ground gave a matchless harmony of tone to all surrounding objects. We were vividly conscious of the joy of mere existence.

Above us a nightingale was warbling his most joyful melodies.

His shakes, now tender, now impassioned, thrilled me through and through. My brothers and sisters gave themselves up to happy frolics. As for me, my emotion choked me. I withdrew a little

distance to be out of the noise. I tried to bring myself into harmony with the inspired songster, whose music had so intoxicated me. How elevated, how pure, how ethereal, how refined I



thought must be the feelings of that charming creature! How fortunate he was to be able to express them in such notes! Would that I had wings on which to soar to him and tell him of the enthusiasm he had aroused in me!

He ceased singing suddenly. I

looked up to ascertain the cause of his silence, and at that moment a mass of earth, which knocked me down and nearly buried me alive, was flung in my face. My head alone escaped, and what did I see? A terrible sight, which still haunts me when I cannot

sleep at night. The heavenly creature, whom I had been worshipping a minute before, had hopped into the midst of my brothers and sisters, and was massacring them wholesale. The survivors of my unhappy family, shuddering with terror, were eager to get back to our colony, but the entrance of the passage was too narrow to admit of all rushing into it at once. My brothers availed themselves of their superior strength to get in before my sisters, whom they pushed back roughly. What cruel egotists fear makes of us all! My poor sisters! I seem to see them still pleading for pity, now from their brothers, now from the hateful nightingale! Very few escaped from the massacre. As for me, the earth which covered me hid me from the horrid murderer. It was that which saved me. A little later I got back to our home, now a scene of the utmost desolation. There remained but eight of my sisters and twenty-two of my brothers. I refrained from reproaching the latter in any way. Their crime was the result of the instinct of self-preservation. Perhaps if I had been amongst them at that awful moment I should have done as they did. Moreover, their manner clearly proved that their consciences severely pricked them.

I reflected much upon this incident, and realised that henceforth I must mistrust my first impressions; that I must sometimes examine my feelings, and never allow myself to be carried away by irrational enthusiasm. I now knew that the most charming and attractive creatures are sometimes the most treacherous and the most to be avoided. Later observations in the course of my adventurous life ratified this first opinion.

Another thing of a totally dif-

ferent character greatly influenced my fate. A little later signs of discord began to disturb our family relations. Discussions, which used to end amicably, now took a different turn. They often became acrimonious, and several times I had to interfere to prevent a fight. I must explain that we had grown older. We were completely transformed, alike physically and mentally, and, without disguise, I must own that our bodies were more improved than our minds. A new feeling, hitherto unknown, had taken the place of the affection which formerly animated us. The exacting passion of jealousy, the mother of so much evil, gradually acquired sway over the minds of my brothers. It soon became impossible for us to live together. We separated, and each went his own way, to scoop out a private residence for himself. Our birthplace was a meadow, sloping gently to the south. A few scattered trees—walnut I think they were—cast a little shade here and there, leaving the rest of the field exposed to the heat of the sun. The shady places were much sought after by us crickets. I settled down beneath the shelter of a large stone, which protruded from the ground, and from the summit of which I could enjoy the beautiful view it commanded, without venturing far from home. I lived a very lonely life. I forgot to mention that, after the catastrophe related above, my brothers fought rather shy of me, evidently feeling somewhat embarrassed in my society. They were aware that I had witnessed their unworthy conduct in the melancholy emergency. I had never reproached them; we had never talked the matter over together, or, indeed, made the very slightest allusion to it; yet their feeling against me gradually be-

came positive aversion, and what especially grieved me was that my sisters were at last won over to regarding me in the same manner. One day, on some trivial pretext, one of my brothers picked a quarrel with me, and suddenly, when I least expected it, flung himself upon me with the greatest fury. I was obliged to defend myself, and in this fratricidal struggle I was unlucky enough to inflict a mortal injury.

I was literally overwhelmed with horror. No one had wit-

nessed the involuntary murder, yet my brothers did not hesitate to charge me with it. I could only conclude that the attack on me had been preconcerted amongst them. The event, however, had disappointed their guilty wishes. A fresh but better planned attempt of the same kind might be made at any moment, and I therefore at once decided to leave a spot where my life was in constant danger.

This resolution once made there was no motive for putting off its



execution; on the contrary, there was every reason for losing no time about it. I waited, however, until sunset to start, and once more I climbed up on to my stone to look for the last time from my favourite observatory on all the objects which had become familiar to me, and to bid them farewell for ever. On this occasion my voice was silenced, and my usual joyful songs were replaced by suppressed sighs. Long did I gaze upon the old trees dotting the meadow, the winding path leading across it, the silvery waters of the meandering river at the bottom of the valley, the dis-

tant town, and the rows of poplars with their leaves gently rustling in the evening breeze. Farewell, landscape familiar to my childhood; I look upon thee for the last time! As I came down again I reflected how unconsciously we attach ourselves to the things about us, and how dear the most ordinary objects become to us when we have to leave them.

Would you believe it? I now felt some emotion in looking at a sturdy burdock growing behind my house. I knew every leaf; I had seen each one gradually unfold itself; the very bees which

came to hover over the flowers were familiar to me. One day a *cassida* (beetle) had established herself on one of the leaves, and had begun to feed on it. At first I felt angry, for this seemed to me a kind of desecration of my favourite plant; but reflection convinced me of my injustice, and I ended by making a friend of my neighbour. She listened to my songs of her own free will, and flattered by this homage to my musical talents I conquered the repugnance with which her slovenly habits at first inspired me. Of course you know that the grubs of some beetles are in the habit of covering themselves with their own excrement. Once, at the beginning of our acquaintance, I had applied an injurious epithet to this custom. My neighbour was not at all offended, but gently told me that she could quite understand the aversion she inspired, that she was ashamed of its cause; but that the dirtiness

with which I reproached her was not the result of depraved taste or even of carelessness, but of necessity. All the members of her family, she added, living as they do in exposed situations on leaves, are compelled to resort to some such means to protect themselves from the voracity of birds; that what excited my disgust had a similar effect on those terrible enemies; and that after all it was well worth while to put up with some little inconveniences for the sake of preserving life. I admitted the justice of these arguments, and, as I have said, we struck up quite a warm friendship. A little before the time of which I am now writing my *cassida* underwent her metamorphosis—her wings were grown, and she took flight.

Whilst I was indulging in these reflections the day had gradually faded into twilight. I roused myself from my reverie, and without one backward glance I left the home of my childhood.



CHAPTER II.

EARLY ADVENTURES, AND WHAT SUCCEEDED THEM.

It was now the end of July. The day had been hot, and the evening, instead of being cooler, was even more sultry. Brilliant flashes of lightning and the roll of distant thunder now and then gave warning of an approaching storm. The path I was following wound through the grass of the meadow. Nocturnal prowlers, such as *amarus*, *harpalus*, and *staphylinus* beetles, in search of their prey, now alone, now in parties of two or three, were beginning to come out. I was not at all afraid of them, for I was provided with a pair of jaws formidable enough to inspire respect. Of course I was not afraid. Still I felt a little excited and nervous.

Was it the thunder in the air, or was it because it was something new for me to be wandering about at this time of night? I don't know how it was, but the slightest noise made me tremble. Even the noisy flight of a dung-beetle constantly passing backwards and forwards above my head ruffled my nerves.

I was walking rapidly on,

without any very definite goal in view, trusting to chance for finding shelter for the night, when one of my hind legs suddenly sank into the ground, and I felt it seized and held in the claws of some subterranean creature invisible to me. I shuddered convulsively; then straining every limb I bounded forward, and fell down in a little path

branching off from the one I was following.

As ill-luck would have it, I alighted on the back of a beetle which was just running along this cross-road. It was a beautiful golden carabus, a proud and brilliant coleopteron, who was probably bound for some important rendezvous. The shock



knocked him down, and he rolled over two or three times.

'Stupid creature!' he exclaimed, as he got up. 'Can't you look where you're going?'

Now, although this was not a very polite speech, I was going to apologise, feeling that I was the aggressor, when turning a little away from me he squirted some caustic and horribly noisome

liquid all over me, which got into my eyes and made them smart dreadfully.

‘Wretch!’ I cried, ‘Abominable scoundrel! Do you call this manners? Wait a bit and I’ll

make you repent of your insolence, despicable insect that you are!’

But making some sneering retort which I did not understand, he went off, leaving me mortified, crestfallen, and half suffocated



with the poisonous smell of the stuff he had poured over me. To roll myself in the dust and rub myself vigorously against the stems of the grass was the work of an instant, and I succeeded in getting rid of some of the noisome stuff, though it still clung to my

joints. I wanted to wash myself thoroughly, but where was I to find water? The storm might not burst for some time. Presently I spied rather a tall piece of stubble a little distance off. With some difficulty I climbed up it, and once at the top I looked

round, trying to find some little pool where I could bathe. I was successful; for in the distance, in the very path I had been following, I made out with the aid of the lightning a little puddle of water left by the last shower at the bottom of a rut. Coming down from my elevated position, and resuming the path I had left, I walked rapidly towards this natural bath. I was close to it when I saw a party of grasshoppers, which seemed very merry; and as soon as they caught sight of me hurried towards me, laughing and jumping, evidently with the intention of teasing me. I should have liked to hide myself, but there was no time; and I was still hesitating what to do, when I was surrounded by the graceful creatures.

Alas, what I expected came soon enough! As soon as I was hemmed in on every side by their wild circle they stopped abruptly, and glanced disdainfully at poor wretched me, whilst one of them cried, 'Fie! how horrible! On that all the others hopped away roaring with laughter, and shouting out anything but flattering epithets. Left alone, and feeling more abashed than words can express, I hastened to the puddle and plunged into it.

I was soon clean again, and whilst I was washing I saw a magnificent violet beetle pass along the path above me. He did not notice me, and I took care not to attract his attention. I could not help admiring his elegance and the easy grace with which he ran.

'A plague on you and all like you!' I muttered between my teeth. 'Who would guess from your dainty airs that you carried such horrible scents about you! Appearances are very deceitful.'

I was going on with my interrupted task, chuckling over my

own wit, when I again heard the grasshoppers shouting and laughing merrily; but suddenly the sounds changed into shrill screams and angry yells.

'Ah,' I said to myself, 'the chatterboxes have just found to their cost what it is to offend an ill-mannered fellow of the beetle tribe. My coleopterom has been up to his pranks.'

On the whole I was not sorry that the ill-natured remarks of which I had been the object had been soon avenged. I made haste to leave my bath, and went off as fast as I could; for I guessed that the troop of grasshoppers would soon come to plunge into the puddle for the very same reasons that had actuated me.

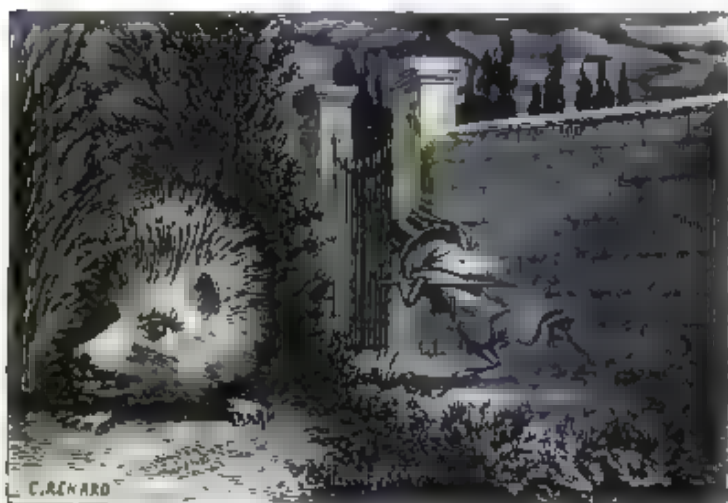
My path now led into a wide road bounded on either side by a bank surmounted by a hedge. On the left, this road was lost in a pine-wood; on the right, it led to a gate giving access to a garden, which appeared to me of vast extent. At the farther end, and a good distance off, I could see the roof and weathercocks of a house of considerable size rising above shrubs of every variety. All these observations I made by means of the brilliant and constant flashes of lightning.

Should I turn to the left or to the right! Should I scale the bank opposite to me! It did not matter to me which way I went; for, as you know, I had no settled purpose. It was therefore the more necessary for me to find some corner in which to pass the night where I should be sheltered from the rain which seemed to be threatening. The sight of a jackdaw flying about in the pine-wood made me decide to turn in the other direction. I had no desire to serve for his supper.

I soon reached the gate of the garden, and was just going through

it when I met a hedgehog going in the opposite direction. Fortunately his attention was at the moment distracted by the barking of a dog a little distance off, and he did not see me. The roads were certainly not safe at this time of night, and I really must make haste and conceal myself if I did not wish to fall a victim to some hungry prowler. Thus far my adventures had been only disagreeable; but if I did not look out, they might soon become tragic.

Whilst reflecting thus, I had been advancing along the garden-path mentioned above. On the left glistened the waters of a pond; on the right were sloping strawberry-beds stocked with luxuriant plants. I left the middle of the path, where I was too conspicuous, and went near the edge, so that I could easily conceal myself under a leaf if any fresh danger should menace me. It was a good thing I did. I had scarcely turned to the right when the ground seemed to tremble beneath me,



whilst a terrible noise rapidly increased. It was a carriage drawn by a pair of horses in full trot. I sprang into a strawberry plant, and was congratulating myself on my prudence in having left the middle of the path, when a fresh incident made me shudder with terror.

I was rolling myself up under a large leaf, determined to remain there until the morning, when I felt a heavy paw laid upon my shoulder. At this unexpected touch I turned round trembling with fear and thinking that my last hour was come. My sudden

movement made the creature which had caused it burst out laughing.

'Why, cousin,' it cried, 'it strikes me I've frightened you finely! But come now, is it proper for a cricket to be running about out of doors at this time of night? Where do you spring from?'

This merry greeting reassured me at once. He, or rather she, who addressed me was a mole-cricket, the entrance to whose home was under the very leaf where I had taken refuge. She was standing on her threshold, but the darkness and the agitation

into which the passing of the carriage had thrown me had prevented my seeing her. You know that mole crickets are our near relations; they are very much like us, only they always wear brown, and their habit of constantly digging in the ground in search of the larvae of different kinds, on which they feed, has made their forepaws of a disproportionate size. It was one of those huge paws set down upon me which had so terrified me just before.

'Well,' I replied, laughing, 'I own I was a little startled, but fancy yourself in my place. I thought I was alone; and besides, I am a little nervous and excitable.'

'I see you are, dear cousin, I see you are; but you know when folks are nervous they stay quietly at home at night, they don't go roving about at unreasonable hours. I should have thought you would have been more discreet.'

'O cousin!' I exclaimed, colouring a little, 'how you do talk! If you knew what has happened to me, you would pity me instead of making fun of me.'

'Well, you can tell me all about it. But you had better come in with me; we can talk more privately then, and we shall be out of the rain, which is beginning.'

'But, cousin, I scarcely like to, people are so spiteful; I am afraid.'

'Ah, ah, ah!' she answered; 'lay aside your scruples, poor

child; don't you see that I am old enough to be your grandmother?'

As she spoke she went in; and I followed her, thinking over this strange adventure. My innate delicacy had been more than once wounded by my cousin's excessive familiarity with a relative she now met for the first time. Some of the expressions she used betrayed a certain want of culture; but I excused her on account of her age, and of the heartiness of her welcome. She was evidently one of those good creatures with whom one could be quite at home; she wore her heart on her sleeve, as the saying goes; and besides, her proffered hospitality came in the nick of time.

We went along a very narrow passage, which was so dark that I had to grope my way.

'Don't be afraid to come straight on, dear cousin—the path is quite even. And here we are in my dining-room; you see my quarters are pretty comfortable.'

'I assure you, dear cousin, that I see absolutely nothing. My eyes are wide open, but it is so very dark here that I can make out nothing.'

'Of course it is; I forgot that. My home is so familiar to me that I don't need to see to find my way about it, but it's different for you. What shall we do? O, I know; rest a bit; I'll be back in a minute.'

(To be continued)



THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE MOLE CRICKET OBTAINED A LIGHT.

THE mole cricket passed me, and went back through the passage by which we had just come. I remained alone, wondering what idea had struck her, and how she would manage to light her room. I waited some time, but at last a pale bluish light, which became gradually brighter, seemed to shine from the walls of the passage. Then the mole cricket came into the room where she had left me, followed by a little scintillating light.

'Ah,' I cried, 'a glowworm!'

'Hush!' whispered my cousin, in my ear; 'call him Firefly; the expression worm might annoy him.' Then in a louder voice, 'Dear cousin, let me introduce you to one of my best friends, who is so good as to put himself to some inconvenience on your behalf. You see,' she added, laughing, 'that my old head can still strike out a

bright idea now and then. Mark each other's acquaintance whilst I go and take a peep into my larder; you must be hungry. Don't be taken in by his masculine ways,' the mole cricket whispered to me; 'he is of my sex, but for some reason or other, I'm sure I don't know what, he wishes to disguise it. Don't let out that you know it.'

On that she left us. I made a few polite remarks to the glowworm, who replied in very friendly terms. I saw at once that she was no common insect; her courteous mode of expressing herself showed that she was used to good society. Her aristocratic manners, her dignified bearing, and a certain melancholy of expression were very prepossessing. I felt drawn towards her at once, and it seemed to me that the attraction was mutual.

To humour her fancy, and also



to please my cousin, I respected her *incognito*; so my readers must not be surprised that I used masculine pronouns in addressing her.

We exchanged a few conventional remarks, as people do when they meet for the first time. She asked me no questions, and I admired her discretion.

At this time my cousin was busy getting supper ready for us. She had fetched several things out of a hole which served as her pantry, and placed them in the middle of the room. With no little satisfaction, for I was getting very hungry, I noticed several larvæ of cockchafers and weevils, trophies of my hostess's skill in hunting, and a certain brown object, the nature of which I could not at first make out.

'Come, friends, come to supper; the food is all fresh and choice. I particularly recommend these tender cockchafer larvæ; they are great delicacies, and taste delicious.'

I did not need any pressing. We were silent for some time, busy in appeasing the pangs of hunger. Now and then we heard the rumbling of the thunder, the sound deadened by the layer of earth between us and the surface of the soil. We could also distinguish the dull dripping of the heavy rain on the strawberry-plants, and I mentally congratulated myself on my luck in finding such a pleasant shelter in the very nick of time. Besides these natural noises, I heard another which rather puzzled me. It was a kind of continuous rustling, like that produced by the rain, only it seemed to come from the very bowels of the earth at no great distance from us. I was going to ask the mole cricket about it, when she suddenly raised her head and made us a sign to be silent. I

thought she was listening to the noise which had attracted my notice, and I looked at her inquiringly, pointing to the place from which it seemed to come.

'No,' she said, after a moment's hesitation, 'I thought I heard something else; the noise you are thinking of comes from a neighbouring wasps' nest.'

'A wasps' nest.' Then we are not safe here.'

'Don't be alarmed, dear cousin; the wasps are at home and we are at home. There is no communication between their house and mine; and unless we go to look for them which we shall take pretty good care not to do—we have nothing to fear from them.'

'But you seemed nervous a minute ago.'

'Ah, yes; but for another reason. I thought I heard a mole, but I was mistaken.'

'A mole! Are there any herabouts?'

'I am afraid there are. But go on with your supper, for another danger may threaten us in an other quarter of an hour. We may be overtaken by the flood, and then we shall have to decamp in double-quick time.'

We hastened to finish our meal, and I thought to myself that my delight at finding myself in safety in my cousin's home had been a little premature, for there was no denying that the dangers of my present situation, though of a novel description, were none the less serious. As a natural result of these reflections my thoughts flew back to days gone by, to the happy carelessness of my early life, and then to my quarrels with my brothers; to the terrible event which had broken in upon the previously even tenor of my peaceful existence, to the various incidents of the evening; and I wondered what unknown experiences still

awaited me in the hazardous course marked out for me by Fate.

'You are pensive, dear cousin. Perhaps you have something on your mind? But a truce to all melancholy thoughts. I would

offer you some strawberries if the season were not so far advanced. Come, eat this spider; it's a tid-bit not to be despised.'

As she spoke the mole cricket took the brown object I had no-



ticed at the first, and pushed it towards me. It was neither more nor less than a spider.

'Thank you,' I said, 'I don't want anything more. But tell me how you come to have spiders on your table. This one is of the *epara*, who spend all their lives on

trees, and I don't suppose you have climbed to fetch it from one.'

'No; truth to tell, I found it when I was rummaging about underground.'

'Underground! And what was it doing there?'

'It had been buried there.'

'You are making fun of me, cousin; since when have spiders buried their dead?'

'To begin with, the one you have there is not dead, and moreover it was not buried by spiders.'

'What! it is not dead?'

'Certainly not; it is only paralysed. It has been pricked and buried by a sphex. But you had better ask Firefly, he knows all about it.'

Firefly bent his head in token of acquiescence.

Turning again to my cousin, I begged her to explain this mystery.

'There's not the slightest mystery,' she replied. 'You know what ichneumons are?'

'O, yes; I've often seen them. They are winged insects with long thin bodies, generally barred with red and black. When I was a child I was told to avoid them. To own the truth, though, I never knew why. Afterwards I forgot all about the warning, and I am still at a loss to understand why it was given to me, for I have never been in the least annoyed by any of these insects.'

'Of course not with all that armour on. They don't trouble me either; but it's different with creatures whose bodies are not as well protected as ours. You must know that ichneumons—the females at least—wage war to the death against all other insects. They are of every form and colour—many, as you say, red and black. The big ones, such as the *pimpla*, hunt for caterpillars and large larvæ; the small ones, such as the *ayasa*, *oxyurus*, are always on the look-out for plant-lice and small larvæ. But observe, they don't eat them; they only want them to lay their eggs in their bodies, which they do after piercing them with a kind of

sting or dart with which they are provided. The worms which come out of these eggs get under the skin of their victims, and they prey upon them alive.'

'How horrible!'

'You have no idea what an immense number of insects, especially of caterpillars, which are their favourite prey, are destroyed by ichneumons.'

'And what an awful death! But I don't see what that has to do with—'

'You'll soon know. The sphexes, such as the *crabro*, the *populus*, and *philanthus*, are relations of ichneumons. Like them they deposit their eggs in the bodies of other insects, but before doing so they paralyse them by inoculating them with a venom which benumbs without killing them. That done, they bury them. Their object in acting thus is to prevent their victims from escaping their dreadful fate before the hatching of the egg and the birth of the grub which is to devour them.'

'I begin to understand. But at least their way of going to work is less cruel than that of the ichneumons, their benumbed victims do not suffer.'

'You are mistaken,' cried the glowworm; 'though paralysed, and unable to make the slightest movement, they have not lost all feeling, and are still sensible of what is going on about them. I was once the victim of a sphex, yes, I who am now addressing you.'

'Nonsense!'

'It's true enough.'

'It seems incredible.'

'You may well say that, but my case was quite exceptional.'

'Tell us about it.'

'With pleasure.'

'I think it was about the end of last month. At all events I

came out one morning from beneath the stone which served me as a shelter during the day, and was wandering about among the plants, when I felt a prick on my back, and looking up I saw a sphex hovering above me. I had no time to wonder what had happened to me, for I at once sank into a state of such entire prostration that I could not stir a limb. Thus benumbed I was buried by the sphex, together with a spider and a caterpillar. We each had an egg glued to our skin, and I knew perfectly well that from this egg would proceed a grub which would feed upon my flesh. It was, as you may imagine, a terrible situation. My lamp shed a feeble light in the tomb where I lay with my companions in misfortune. Like myself they knew the fate which awaited them; I could see it in their looks, the only means of communication between us. I can tell you we exchanged glances full of horror. A few days—days of agony unutterable, of which even now I cannot think without a shudder—passed by in this state of terrible anticipation. Then I saw the eggs on the bodies of my companions gradually open, and a frightful worm came out of each and crept beneath its victim's skin. The poor creatures' eyes expressed the greatest horror and suffering, but they could not move. A similar fate awaited me. I gazed upon my egg, and could not look away from it. Every instant I expected to see it move, and to know that the awful moment for the hatching of the worm had arrived. Now it seemed to be swelling, now to be crushing me with its weight, now to be burning into me. I had an acute, smarting, intolerable pain in the part of my body to which it was attached. The least movement from me

would have been enough to get rid of it, and yet I could not make that movement. But the egg did not open; my sufferings were all mental, all purely the result of my excited imagination—none the less terrible for that, though—and they became so intense that I finally lost consciousness.

'How long I remained insensible I do not, and probably never shall, know. When I came to myself the situation was but little changed: the half-devoured corpses of my companions emitted a horrible odour, my lamp still burnt feebly, and my egg, still attached to my body, was not hatched. Mechanically I made an effort to tear it off, and found to my surprise that my torpor was gone. The egg rolled right away from me.'

'And with one bound,' broke in the mole cricket, 'he was on his feet, in an instant he was buried in the soft earth forming the walls of his tomb, and soon he had forced his way to the surface of the ground. Another moment and he was saved. A narrow escape you had, too; your egg was a bad one, though not for you, of course. Now, cousin, do you understand?'

'Perfectly. So this spider—'

'Has been pricked by a sphex, like our friend Firefly.'

'It has an egg on its body?'

'Just so. Look, there it is between its forelegs.'

So it was, I could see it, and when the glowworm caught sight of it he flung himself upon it in a regular rage and scrunched it between his jaws, telling us that the remembrance of his days of agony had aroused all his old hatred of sphexes and their offspring.

'The spider is saved, then?' I inquired.

'Of course it is.'

'It will wake from its torpor?'
'Not a doubt of it now that the egg is gone.'

'Well, Firefly, you have just done it a great service, you have earned its gratitude.'

'But I have done something too, cousin; I think I helped to save its life. Didn't I disinter it from its tomb? But for me its doom would have been consummated.'

'All very fine, friend,' I whispered to my cousin; 'only don't forget you offered it to me to eat, and of course it heard you; it *must* have heard.'

'So it must. I have a great mind to eat it up.'

'No, no, spare it. It will be so glad to come to life again, that it will bear you no malice. Besides, spiders have the most refined feelings. This one would not think of blaming you for acting as it would probably have done in your place.'

'Well, cousin, have your own way.'

I examined the spider we had just saved from death. I drew out her legs one after the other, and found that they retained all their flexibility. I also saw that the eyes of the spider were full of intelligence, a fact I had not before noticed. She was a very fine specimen. I dragged her into a corner of the room, and there left her to recover her senses.

'Now that you have had some food,' said the mole cricket to me, 'you must tell us your story. I shall be glad to learn to what circumstances I am indebted for the pleasure of receiving you here. Do you live near?'

'Not very. The journey took me an hour, but I was a good deal delayed. I could have done

it in half the time if I had walked quickly and without stopping.'

'What, a whole hour! Quite a journey, to be sure. You were not just taking a walk, then?'

'No; the fact is, I am a regular vagrant, with no settled residence.'

'You must be in fun.'

'A fugitive without hearth or home.'

'A fugitive! pray how is that?'

'I am speaking the exact truth. I have left home never to return. I will tell you the reasons which led me to take this important step, but I shall have to go a long way back.'

'We are all attention.'

I gave the mole cricket and glowworm a faithful account of my life. I told them, without omitting anything, the whole chain of events which had forced upon me the necessity of leaving my birthplace, my feelings at parting from my home, the various incidents by the way, to the moment when my cousin's paw laid on my shoulder frightened me so much. 'Now,' I wound up, 'I am going to seek for some quiet spot where I can settle, but I really have no fixed plan of any kind.'

'Well,' said the mole cricket, 'it is no use doing anything to-day, we'll talk about it to-morrow. Meanwhile, let us rest; the storm is over, and there is no longer any danger of our being swamped. Firefly, it's too late for you to go home; spend the night here.'

The glowworm consented, and I was by no means sorry to sleep for a few hours, and to get over all my excitement and fatigue. We settled ourselves comfortably, and the most profound silence soon reigned in our subterranean apartment.



CHAPTER IV.

A CHAT.

NOTHING occurred to disturb our repose. The night passed over quietly. When I woke, everything was just as it had been when I fell asleep. Firefly's lamp was still lighting up our dining-room, now converted into a dormitory; it was impossible to guess the time, as I observed to the mole cricket, who had also just woke up.

'It is day,' she replied; 'you can go out and say good morning to the sun whilst I get breakfast ready.'

'I should like to know how you can tell that it is day.'

'Easily enough. My neighbours the wasps let me know that. Don't you hear the noise they are making? It's the same every morning.'

'Well, I'll take your advice and go out for a minute. Which

of these passages shall I take? This is the one we came in by yesterday, isn't it?'

'Yes; follow it—you can't go wrong.'

I turned into the passage alluded to. It soon became pitch dark; but I walked straight on without fear of going wrong, for there were no side-turnings. I couldn't help coming out at the end opposite the subterranean room, or in other words, in the open air.

As I expected, I soon made out a faint glimmer of light; the passage became less and less dark, and at last I reached the entrance. A few steps more, and I was in the broad garden-path.

It was a delicious morning. The sun, bathed in rosy vapour, was just above the horizon; the air, laden with balmy fragrances,

had all the invigorating freshness peculiar to the first hour of dawn. The only traces of the storm of the previous evening were a few pearly drops of moisture sparkling on the strawberry-leaves.

I greeted the orb of day with joyous chirps. All my gloomy fancies had vanished, and the future seemed *coulour de rose*; so entirely do the impressions we receive depend, not on our actual situation, but on the mood we happen to be in at the time.

Engaged in this and other similar psychological reflections, I reentered the passage to rejoin my friends, and breakfast with them.

Firefly was now awake, and had been placed by the mole cricket in the centre of the room, and they were only waiting for me to begin breakfast.

My morning walk had given me an appetite; and after exchanging a few polite words with the glowworm, I lost no time in doing justice to the dishes set before us by our hostess. These dishes were much the same as those we had had for supper.

I asked the mole cricket if she had any trouble in getting them.

'None whatever,' was the answer. 'The place I live in is well stocked with the larvae of cockchafers. You know that the grubs of those insects are very fond of the roots of strawberries and lettuce, and my parents were quite right to settle me in this strawberry bush. Besides, the garden we are in contains a great variety of plants and shrubs, and supports a considerable number of weevils and golden beetles, which, as you know, bury themselves in the ground to undergo their metamorphosis. The soil is literally riddled with larvae and pupae of every kind, and I live in the midst of abundance.

But there are two sides to every question, and my prosperity has its drawbacks. I can't enjoy it in peace. Moles and shrews come to poach on my preserves; and if I fall into their paws, there would soon be an end of me. Fortunately I am very keen of hearing. I am always warned of their approach in time, and am ready at once to take refuge in my galleries, which are too narrow for them. My only fear is that I may be surprised at night; but I sleep with one eye open.'

'You have no other dangers to fear?'

'O, yes, I have. The gardenor of the place has taken a dislike to me. He imagines that I damage his plants, and lays to my charge the mischief done to the strawberries by the grubs of cockchafers. The other day, close by here at the entrance to one of my galleries, I found an earthen pot buried; and so placed that I should certainly have tumbled in if I had not been looking where I was going. Once at the bottom I could never have got out again. It was only the day before yesterday that that might have happened.'

'Have you any brothers and sisters in the neighbourhood?'

'Yes; our family is pretty numerous. I should say that there are some twenty of us settled about here.'

'Do you see each other sometimes?'

'One of my sisters visits me now and then. She is a very amusing talker, and it is a great pleasure to me to see her. I was looking out for her at my door when you dropped from the sky yesterday evening.'

'And there's a wasp's settlement close by too?'

'Yes.'

'Very unpleasant neighbours.'

'O, I don't visit them, at least not of my own free will.'

'Have you ever visited them against your will?'

'Well, yes, I have.'

'Pray explain yourself.'

'One day when I was making a gallery I very nearly fell head foremost into their nest.'

'A ship which might have been serious.'

'They didn't see me, luckily I retired without venturing on more than one look through the hole I had made in their wall.'

'What did you see?'

'A very curious sight. I saw an immense hole in which hung some dozen horizontal terraces arranged in rows one above the other, and connected together by what I may call little pillars. These terraces consisted of a vast number of little cells, each of which seemed to contain a grub, the larvæ of the wasps, in fact. A number of wasps were busy feeding these grubs, whilst others were working hard at the construction of new cells. I saw all that at a glance, you understand, and did not linger to watch them, for I did not feel quite at my ease. I hurried off; after patching up the hole I had made in their wall, as best I could.'

'Was the wall easy to pierce?'

'O, yes, easy enough. It was a kind of crust of moderate thickness, consisting of about a dozen thin layers with spaces left between them.'

'Are there very many wasps in the nest? I inquired.'

'A great many—several thousands at least.'

'Do they pass the winter under ground?'

'Yes, but a great many perish in the autumn. A catastrophe might overtake my neighbours any day.'

'What do you mean?'

'They were very ill advised to settle here. One of these fine mornings the gardener will serve them a trick.'

'What trick?'

'O, he'll come before sunrise and pour some suffocating liquid, of which I don't know the name, into the opening of their nest.'

'You mean benzoïn,' murmured Firefly.

'After that he will put a pot turned upside down over the opening, and quietly take himself off.'

'And how about the wasps?'

'They will all die. I shall hear them making a terrible hubbub in their nest for some little time, but that hubbub will gradually die away till it is succeeded by complete silence, the silence of the grave.'

'How awful!'

'Of course it is; but what would you have me do?'

'You might save them.'

'By scraping out another passage for them?'

'Yea.'

'Thank you. I shall take good care how I do that. I should be their first victim.'

'Not if you told them at once that you had come to warn them.'

'Bosh! I tell you they would murder me at once. Can you reason with wasps? with angry wasps, too, for of course they'll be enraged when they find their retreat cut off.'

'Suppose you were to warn them at once of the danger which threatens them.'

'They would treat me as an old fool, and send me to the right-about, telling me to mind my own business. You don't know what wasps are. They think themselves infinitely superior to us.'

'They are like bees for that. There was a burdock near my home, on the flowers of which

been often settled. I made advances to them sometimes, but they were almost always ill-received. Some did not answer at all. Others called me a drone, a good-for-nothing lazy fellow, and a few, more polite, said they had no time to stop chattering. In short, I found that if they had their good qualities—and I really think they are intelligent, active, and industrious—their bad temper quite counterbalanced them.

'Their temper is very bad, they are touchy, passionate, and revengeful. But wasps are even worse.'

'It's evident,' I said, laughing, 'that they won't get much sympathy from you.'

'They really are nothing to me. I have never had anything to do with them, I only speak from hearsay. If they are molested, let them defend themselves. I shan't meddle with them; they must help themselves as best they can.'

'Well, perhaps you are right. But why does the gardener bear them a grudge?'

'O, for several very good reasons. First of all they eat his peaches, grapes, plums, pears—all his best fruits, in fact. Besides, when the master of the place is at table with his family, they do not hesitate to go and taste all the dishes. They buzz about the mistress's head, they buzz about the children. The mistress starts and screams with terror, so do the children. The master jumps up, and lays about him right and left with his napkin. In fact, their effrontery causes a great deal of trouble at meals.'

'One would think,' I observed, laughing, 'that you had been present at some such scene.'

'I never saw it myself, but a friend of mine, a large blue-bottle fly who has often done so, de-

scribed it to me just as I have told it to you.'

'And he was right,' said the glowworm, 'that is exactly what happens. I lived in the dining-room of the house for a week myself once, and I was often witness of just such a scene.'

'What! you lived in the house! Whatever were you doing there?'

'O, I was there by no wish of my own. The master's children were attracted by the light of my lamp, so they took me and put me in a glass on the mantelpiece. I immediately extinguished my lamp, and the next day the glass was put back on the sideboard, and I was forgotten. A few days afterwards, however, the housemaid caught sight of me when she was dusting the nicknacks on the sideboard. She at once threw me on the floor, at the same time raising her foot to crush me. Fortunately I fell into one of the cracks of the boarding, and so escaped death. When night came on, I managed to slip out of the house, and got home again. It was time I was set at liberty, for I was half dead with hunger.'

'You have had some adventures, Firefly?'

'I have indeed. I could tell you of plenty more. One day I found myself in the jaws of a beetle, which was carrying me off with the evident intention of devouring me; and it was by the merest chance that I escaped. As he ran along, my beetle came full tilt against another giddy fellow of his own species, who was hastening in the opposite direction. The two rogues began to quarrel, and I took advantage of it to save myself.'

'Dastardly race!' I growled between my teeth.

'Friend Firefly,' said my cousin, 'you will come to a bad end.'



But would any one in his senses wander about at night in an unsafe neighbourhood with a lighted lamp. What an extraordinary fancy it is! Can't you walk without a light, like the rest of the world?

'It has been the custom in our family from time immemorial,' replied the glowworm.

'Don't tell me about your time immemorial. Is there a single good reason for keeping up the custom? For my part I can't see the use of it; on the contrary, it seems to me most dangerous.'

'There is one very obvious reason?'

'And what might that be?'

'It serves as a signal.'

'I don't understand.'

'A beacon then, if you prefer it.'

'For your enemies?'

'O, no; quite the reverse.'

Firefly was evidently annoyed at the persistence with which my

cousin plied him with questions about the use of his lamp.

The mole cricket opened her eyes very wide at her friend's last sentence, and the glowworm looked rather confused at the admission which had escaped him; it was easy to see from his manner that he would gladly have retracted his words.

Our hostess gave him a very derisive look, and then, turning to me, burst into a roar of laughter.

I had already noticed that my cousin, though a worthy creature enough in other respects, was not gifted with too much tact or polish of manner. She was, however, too good-natured to press the subject, and only answered,

'All that is very interesting, my dear friend, very interesting, and very poetic. Far be it from me to deny that it's very poetic indeed; but, mark my words, it will be misinterpreted.'

'Very possibly. But were you not telling us just now about your own vagaries? Have they not twice nearly led to fatal results? Every one has his fate. I have seen many creatures perish whose habits were far more prudent than mine; so I shall just go quietly on my way till my hour comes.'

'I see,' I observed, 'that you are something of a fatalist and quite a philosopher.'

'Yes; much observation and reflection have made me both.'

'Your wisdom and the poetry of your sentiments appear to me equally admirable.'

'Misfortune has matured my judgment.'

'What on earth are all these fine words about?' broke in the molecricket. 'Come, cousin; come, Firefly, have some more breakfast, you must both be hungry.'

'More breakfast! Why, we've only just done eating! I'm not a bit hungry.'

'Well, please yourselves, but I am going to have some more.'

'How many meals do you take a day?'

'A dozen at least - generally more - twenty at the most; my appetite is always equally good.'

'My goodness, what a digestion! You must spend your life in eating.'

'You've hit it exactly, cousin, and you might do worse.'

'O, yes, of course. Don't imagine for a moment that I meant any reproach; I was merely expressing my admiration of your turning your time to such good account. But now I must take my leave, and go and sing to the sun. You'll come with me, Firefly.'

'I regret extremely that I cannot accept your kind invitation,' replied the glowworm; 'but I never go out except in the evening, never have done so, in fact, since my adventure with the sphex.'

(To be continued.)



THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER V.

THERE ARE HAPPY MOMENTS IN LIFE.

I AGAIN crept through the entrance passage, and once outside I took up my station at a little distance from the opening of the mole cricket's grotto, on a clod of earth brightened by a warm sunbeam, which shone through the strawberry-leaves. I half unclosed my elytra or wing-covers, and basked for a few minutes in the soft warm air of the kind of harbour formed by the plants above me. I then attended to my toilette. It is an hereditary peculiarity amongst us to be careful of our persons. We love cleanliness, we are sensitive to pleasant scents, and we abhor bad smells. The insult offered to me the evening before by the handsome carabus had therefore affected me most painfully. I thought of it again

as I was cleaning my claws, and my veins swelled with fresh indignation. But I soon dispelled these disagreeable reflections; and with a view to calling up others more in harmony with the beauty of the scene in which I found myself, I struck up one of my most joyful songs.

I was in good spirits, and I sang for a long time. Now and then, however, I paused to listen for an answering voice; but it was evident that no creature of my own species lived in these parts, for not a sound betrayed the presence of another cricket. This silence struck me as strange, for I was not accustomed to it. Still I must own I rather liked it than otherwise, on account, probably, of the enmity shown to me by my

brothers, which had resulted in destroying the charm that their voices would have had for me if they had been friendly.

Time flew fast; but I was so glad to be safe, and free from anxiety, that I could not bring myself to close the solo-concert to which I was treating myself. The sound of my own voice elated me, and presently, carried away by a kind of joyful intoxication, I found myself jumping about and gesticulating like a mad creature.

'Ah, well,' I said to myself, 'one can do as one likes when one is alone.'

I had fancied myself in solitude, but I had a witness. In the very height of my excitement I suddenly met the eyes of a grasshopper, perched motionless upon a leaf beside me, and looking at me with an expression of surprised amusement. How did she get there without my seeing her? How long had she been there? It was impossible for me to tell. On catching sight of her my ardour was suddenly damped, and I stood still as if petrified, in the most ridiculous attitude possible, with three legs on the ground and the others in the air. At the same moment the conviction that I cut a very ridiculous figure shot across my mind, and my first impulse was to dart down my cousin's passage. My agitation prevented my seeing the entrance immediately, and one brief moment of hesitation sufficed to make me change my mind, and saved me from crowning my vagaries by what would have been a piece of sheer folly.

I stole another glance at the grasshopper, and saw that she was a beautiful young creature of a green colour, and with a fine figure. She remained motionless, and kept her eyes fixed on me with what seemed to me a most ironical expression. It became imperative to

do something to alter the situation, and I could think of nothing better than to burst out laughing. The grasshopper smiled, and then, infected by the contagion of my example, frankly joined in my merriment. I was saved!

'This fortunate meeting delights me, charming grasshopper,' I began. 'I thought I was quite alone, and I am more than glad to be able to pay my respects to one so worthy of every attention.'

'Are you really so very delighted, friend cricket?' was the reply. 'It strikes me that my appearance just now—well, surprised you a little, if it did not annoy you.'

'I was surprised, I own. Have you only just come?'

'I was going by, when curiosity made me stop a minute. You seem in very good spirits.'

'O, we all try to shake off our depression sometimes. I really am the most unfortunate of crickets.'

'I could never have believed it.'

'It's true, for all that.'

'You have rather an original way of giving vent to your trouble.'

'I was indulging in all those vagaries just now merely to try and divert my thoughts. I am a miserable exile.'

'An exile?'

'Yes, an exile. I was born far from here. But the victim of the unjust hatred of my family, I had to leave my home and the lovely scenes of my childhood to escape from the iniquitous plots which daily placed my life in danger.'

'Poor cricket?'

'Arrived in this neighbourhood, after going through the most terrible dangers, a lucky accident led to my meeting a female relation, who accorded me the kindest hospitality.'

'Who is she?'

'An elderly mole cricket. There is the entrance to her house.'

'I know her; she is a good creature.'

'Very good; a little peculiar though.'

'So she is.'

'You know her, you say?'

'O, only alightly. She is a great stay-at-home; but I have heard of her.'

'You belong to these parts, then? You have relations and friends here?'



'I was born in this strawberry-bed, and I have never left it.'

We chatted on in this style about different things for more than an hour. The grasshopper delighted me, and I thoroughly enjoyed her conversation.

'This is a charming neighbourhood,' I said at last. 'I think I shall settle here. You walk this side sometimes, I suppose?'

'Sometimes. I go just where the humour takes me.'

'Sweet grasshopper, how glad

I am to have met you! You seem to sympathise with my misfortunes. I can hear it in the very tones of your voice, and in listening to you I forget all my past troubles.'

'Good bye, dear cricket. I can't stop any longer.'

'What' you are going already?'

'I must.'

'Shall I see you again?'

'Perhaps.'

As she spoke she made me a graceful gesture of farewell, and with one bound sprang away. For a moment I saw her noiselessly posing herself on her light-green wings, and then she disappeared in the distance.

I remained for a few minutes in deep thought, gazing in the direction the grasshopper had taken. The day was already drawing to its close, and my astonishment was great at noticing that the sun was beginning to set. How very quickly the time had passed, to be sure! I was very hungry, which was not much to be wondered at, for I had eaten nothing since the morning.

The lateness of the hour and my appetite alike warned me that it was time to rejoin my companions. I was not at all afraid of not finding enough to eat, for what the mole cricket had said in the morning about her numerous meals made me feel sure that her table would be well spread.

I was right. On going into the dining room, I saw my cousin at her twelfth or fifteenth repast of cockchafer grubs, whilst Firefly, apparently sound asleep, lay on a ledge on one of the walls of the grotto. He had, however, had the consideration to leave his lamp burning. The spider, still wrapped in her lethargic torpor, had not made the slightest movement, and was dimly visible, lying on her side, and with outstretched limbs,

in the corner to which I had dragged her the night before.

'Where do you come from?' the mole cricket asked me, between two mouthfuls. 'We haven't seen you all day, your walk has been a long one.'

'No, it hasn't,' I replied; 'I did not go far from your house. The blue sky, the brilliant sunshine, and the heat were so delightful that I spent the whole day enjoying them. Your home is very pleasantly situated.'

'Truth to tell, I don't care much personally for its advantages, but I am duly and fully sensible of them, because it is to them that I owe my abundant and varied diet, a privilege I value above any other.'

'Well, that is at least a candid confession.'

'It surprises you. Ah, friend, you are still young! When you come to my age you'll change your mind on that point. Your poetry will be gradually transformed to prose, and you won't despise the pleasures of the table so much. Every age has its fancies.'

'How old are you, then?'

'What a very indiscreet remark! Whoever heard of such a question being put to a person of my sex! I am as old as I look; so now you know.'

'I beg pardon, dear cousin,' I replied, laughing. 'I hadn't the slightest intention of being rude. You told me yesterday you were old enough to be my mother, and I thought—'

'I told you that, did I? Well, perhaps I did, and you must be content with that vague assertion. One's age is a point on which one is willing that there should be some little uncertainty.'

'Has anything new occurred during my absence?'

'Nothing. Firefly has been sleeping the calm and peaceful

sleep of a virtuous insect with a well-filled stomach and an easy conscience, and the spider is still sleeping off the effects of the poison.'

'Do you think she will remain in that state much longer?'

'I neither know nor care. But come; eat this balanus grub. Its larva lives in nuts, and has a very delicate flavour.'

'It really is delicious. Do you find many of them?'

'There is a nut-tree not far from here, and at this time of year the larvæ of the balanus or nut-weevils leave their nuts through holes nibbled by themselves, and bury themselves in the ground to undergo their transformation.'

'You certainly have an advantage over me in being able to burrow in the ground after your food. We other crickets have to content ourselves with what passes the doors of our homes.'



'But you can burrow in the ground.'

'Yes; but only to make holes to live in.'

'What do you feed upon?'

'On flies, wood-lice, and ants.'

'Pooh! Ants have a horrid acid taste.'

'O, you get used to that. We eat blades of grass too.'

'Miserable diet! Live with me; you shall have a good meal for nothing every day.'

'You are very kind, dear cousin, and I would gladly accept your invitation; but there is one obstacle.'

'And what is that?'

'Your house seems very dark

to me. We shall not always have Firefly's lamp to light us, and besides, I love the sun and its warm beams.'

'And soft breezes and the scent of flowers, and fine scenery and vegetation, and all the rest of it. I understand. Well, settle near here; there's nothing to prevent your scooping out a home to suit you.'

'I had already thought of it.'

'Very well; then you've only to do it.'

I did not think it necessary to mention my meeting with the grasshopper to my cousin, for of course she would have been sure to attribute to it my sudden deter-

mization to take up my residence near her.

'Well, cousin,' she went on, 'have you had enough? You have. Then go to bed now, and good-night to you, unless you would like to go and dream a little by moonlight.'

'No, I am going to sleep. You think there is no danger from moles to-night?'

'There don't seem to have been any in the neighbourhood to-day; but in any case you may rely on my vigilance. I will wake you at the very slightest alarm.'

The night did not pass over so peacefully as its predecessor. In fact, about the middle—at least when I had been, as it seemed to me, asleep a long time—the sound of voices woke me. I listened. Apparently a dispute was going on, in one of the passages of the house, between my cousin, whose voice I recognised at once, and some one whose harsh tones, betraying violent anger, were not altogether unfamiliar to me. I held myself in readiness to fly to the succour of my relative on the first appeal, reflecting, however, that if she had to defend herself in the narrow passage which was the scene of the quarrel, my help would not be of much avail, except to intimidate her silvercreep by the arrival of unexpected succour. But my intervention was not called for. The voices died away, leading me to conclude that the enemy had beaten a retreat, and then all again became quiet. Firefly slept on all the time, and heard nothing.

The next morning we learnt that my cousin, who sleeps very lightly, had been awakened, towards three in the morning, by a slight noise, a kind of rustling in the entrance passage; that this noise seemed gradually to approach, that she went to see what it was, and found herself face to face with

a beetle, who for some reason unknown was trying to get into the house; that she inquired the reason of this untimely intrusion, and was answered in a haughty fashion—so insolent in the whole race of beetles, and that the enemy finally beat a retreat, swearing and threatening.

'I have already had similar visitations,' added the mole cricket, 'and am so used to them, that I don't trouble my head about them. Beetles and other predatory insects sometimes come in here and steal my larvae, and I just lay in a fresh store; but this time your presence here, friend Firefly, compelled me to preserve my home inviolate. That thief might have carried you off under our very noses.'

Firefly expressed her gratitude in glowing terms, and I joined him in congratulating our worthy hostess on her vigilance and courage.

'O, don't pay me so many compliments, friends, they are really quite uncalled for. I'm not a bit afraid of beetles, they have always run away from me.'

'But didn't the last one squirt some nasty liquid over you?'

'No, he couldn't turn round in my passage, and he had to beat a retreat backwards.'

The day passed as the previous one had done. The weather continued fine, and I remained until the evening making music on the little hillock, where I had already spent such pleasant hours. To my great regret the grasshopper did not put in an appearance. Had she been prevented from coming? Had she forgotten me? Grasshoppers are always so giddy. This one, though, had seemed more serious than is usual with her race. She had shown sympathy for me, and the way in which we had parted encouraged me to hope. But I must not think of her any more, it was

too late for her to come to-day, so I returned indoors.

A change had taken place there. The spider had at last awoke from her torpor, and was talking to the glowworm. The remains of food lay beside her. I was told that as she came to, she had cried out that she was hungry, and that the mole cricket had generously given her two or three little larvae of coleoptera, which she had eaten in default of flies.

She came up to me and thanked me for interfering on her behalf at a moment when her life had hung on a thread, which proved to me that she had heard our conversation. All this time the mole cricket was bustling about as if she had something else to think of. It was evident she felt slightly embarrassed.

We did not talk that evening. As soon as supper was over, we all went to sleep in our own corners. The spider placed herself close to me, fearfully stretched himself on his usual projection, and the mole cricket reposed near the entrance passage.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAP.

I WAS sleeping soundly, when a rough shake woke me with a start.

'Be quick!' cried the mole cricket. 'Here is the mole! *Sauve qui peut!*'

At this ominous cry I started to my feet, and rushed into the nearest passage. At the same instant I felt something catch hold of me; but it was not the time to pause to see what it was. The passage I had chosen did not seem to be the one of egress, in my agitation I had taken the first which came—the one close to my sleeping-place. No, it was evidently not the way out; and if

not, it was unknown to me. Where did it lead? I should lose myself in this subterranean labyrinth and in the profound darkness. Anyhow the first thing to be done was to escape as quickly as possible, and I rushed on at a frantic pace. 'Bother' what is that clinging to my tail? Ah!

This cry was wrung from me by terror. The earth suddenly gave way beneath my feet, and, for what seemed to me a long time, I felt myself falling through space.

A rough shock stopped me. I was at the bottom of a vast pit. Fortunately I was not hurt, though I had fallen head foremost. But where was I? I felt the ground about me. It was smooth and very hard, it was not soil. The sense of touch was all I had to guide me, for the darkness was complete. I advanced slowly, groping my way with outstretched antennæ, till I came to the foot of a perpendicular wall. This wall was perfectly even, as smooth as the floor. I paced slowly along it, feeling my way before me for fear of another tumble.

On, on I walked for a long, long time, and still under my feet I felt the same smooth hard ground, and on my left the same perpendicular wall as smooth as the ground.

Where could I be? I had not a notion. What was this subterranean channel? Where did it lead? Where did it end? I must be a long distance from my starting point. One thing was certain. I was not sinking into the depths of the earth, for I was walking on firm ground. Presently I thought I made out a star. Ah, yes, there was another up there! I should most decidedly wait here till the morning. If stars were to be seen, of course there must be an opening in the

ceiling, and I should be able to see more clearly when the sun rose. I must stop walking, and wait.

But what had become of the object which had clung to me, and which I had carried with me in my flight! I no longer felt it. It had probably let go when I fell, and remained up above.

The day was long in coming, and I went on thinking, not to any very practical purpose though;

for the more I thought, the more incomprehensible appeared the strange adventure which had befallen me. My poor companions! What had become of them! The mole cricket would have escaped by one of her passages—she was used to such sudden alarms; but the spider and Firefly—they could not run so fast. The spider! The life we had saved had profited her little. And the glowworm! He would have been sure to lose his



presence of mind, very likely he forgot to put out his lamp, and was the first to fall a victim to the mole. I was musing thus when a voice close to my ear made me start.

'Cricket!' some one whispered very softly.

'Ah! What! Who is there?'

'It is I, the spider; your companion in the mole cricket's grotto.'

'You! Impossible!'

'Hush! Speak lower; perhaps the mole is not far off.'

'The mole! Why, we must be ever so far from him! How did you manage to follow me here?'

'I have not moved since our fall.'

'Nonsense! I have been walking for more than an hour.'

'Yes; I have heard you. You have been walking, but without making much progress.'

'What do you mean?'

'You were going round and round.'

These words were a revelation. We were at the bottom of a circular pit. That accounted for my always feeling a wall on my left; yes, that was it! I had been going round and round. Why did not the idea occur to me before!

'Wretched spider!' I exclaimed angrily, 'you heard me going round you for an hour, and never said a word!'

'How could I know what you were driving at! Our fall made me rather giddy, and I was weak, too, after my long fast; so when I came to my senses, and heard you running round and round me

without speaking, I thought the fright, the excitement—well, had upset you a little. You won't be hurt at the idea which occurred to me?'

'What idea?'



'Well, I thought you had become—'

'Mad?'

'Yes, that's it.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Hush! don't laugh so loud.'

'Well, my long tramp might easily make you think me demented.'

'And I did not feel altogether comfortable—quite alone with a madman! So I just spun a thread up to the ceiling, and swung myself out of your reach. When you stopped walking, I thought you were probably calmer, and I spoke to you.'

'Do you know where we are?'

'Of course I do. We are at the bottom of an earthenware pot set by the gardener to catch the mole cricket. Don't you remember what she told us?'

'O yes, I know. Why ever didn't I think of that before?'

'You were too much excited. Whilst you were running about, I was reflecting. We are taken in the trap laid for your cousin, friend cricket.'

'Then we are lost.'

'That does not follow.'

'You have hopes of our escape?'

'Yes, I have—unless the mole comes upon us in his burrowing; there's some fear of that.'

'Heaven forefend! But, by the way, just tell me how you came to the bottom of the pot with me. I suppose you followed me closely?'

'Very closely indeed. Not trusting to the speed of my own legs when the mole cricket gave the alarm, I clung to one of the ends of your tail,* and you carried me off with you.'

'Ah, it was you I had in tow! I really might have guessed it; but in my confusion—What a pity the same happy thought did not occur to poor Firefly! He might have clung to me too.'

'I thought of it for him.'

'What do you mean?'

'At the cry of "*Sauve qui peut*!" I rushed to Firefly, caught him up between my legs, told him to put out his lamp at once, and then I flung myself upon your tail, clutching at it with my mandibles just as you plunged into the passage.'

'He slipped away from you, then, in our flight?'

'Not a bit of it. He is with us

now. In our fall I instinctively loosened my grasp of him, just at the very moment when we were flung into space by the rebounding of your tail from against the end of the passage. We both struck against the ceiling, and I fell down from it again, but he was probably caught by something. There he is above us. Do you see him?'

'O, is that Firefly? Why, I took him for a star just now! I was certainly out of my mind.'

'Yes, that is he. He has only half extinguished his lamp.'

'Why does he remain there without moving or speaking? Hi, Firefly!'

'Hush! Don't shout at him like that; I think he is faint. When he woke just now to find himself in my grasp, he was probably in the dark as to my intentions, and very likely thought his last hour was come. That would account for his present state of torpor.'

'We must go to his assistance. But how can we get up there?'

'I am going there now.'

I guessed that the spider meant to spin a thread from the floor to the ceiling, and that she would thus be able to fetch down the glowworm.

As she was going up, I confided to her what my cousin had told me about Firefly's sex, begging her to respect his *incognito*, which she promised to do.

Presently a slight trembling of the luminous point I had taken for a star showed me that the attempt had been successful. The luminous point came down; and when it was near the ground, the faint light it gave enabled me to make out my old companion huddled together between the legs of the spider, who, heavily laden as she was, came down very slowly. Arrived at the bottom of the

* When the wings of a cricket are folded, they form what looks like a double tapering cone.—TRANSL.

pot, she laid down her burden, and began to rub it, urging me to do the same.

Firefly had really lost consciousness, but, thanks to our energetic friction, he soon came to himself; and his first words, after an astonished glance round him, were a stammering inquiry as to where he was, what had happened, and what had become of the mole cricket. He remem-

bered nothing; everything which had happened since our sudden retreat from the dining-room had escaped him. And it was not much wonder that, roughly seized as he had been by the spider, the stupor of fear should have immediately succeeded that of sleep, reducing him to the state of unconsciousness from which we had just aroused him.

We told him all that had hap-



pened, and when he learnt how much he owed to the spider, whose presence of mind, when the rest of us were beside ourselves with terror, had saved his life, he expressed his gratitude to his preserver in the warmest terms. He thanked me too, though I assured him with a smile that I had been but an unconscious agent in his rescue.

"Now that you have come to yourself, friend Firefly," said the spider, "you may as well give us

a little more light from your lamp, for we can hardly see a bit. That's the next thing to be done, for then we shall know better where we are, and can consult as to the best means of getting away."

Firefly hastened to comply with this request, and we were soon able to examine the place to which the accident of our flight had brought us.

The spider had guessed rightly. We were at the bottom of a large

earthenware pot, such as is used for the cultivation of flowers. The roof of our prison was formed by a clod of soil, kept in its place by some bits of stick, between which hung the roots of grass. It was on one of these sticks that the glowworm had fallen and remained. At the upper edge of the pot we could see a round opening, which we knew to be the entrance to the mole cricket's gallery. Opposite a similar opening represented the continuation of the same gallery, which was broken by the hollow formed by the pot.

The trap was cleverly set, as proved by our having been caught in it.

By which of the two openings I had arrived, I should have been at a loss to say, for I was quite

thrown out of my bearings in this circular pit.

'You came through that one,' said the spider, guessing my thoughts from the way I was looking about me.

'How can you tell?'

'Easily enough. The direction of my thread shows you where Firefly was when I fetched him, above that cross-road which juts out. Well, he could only have been flung there from the point opposite to us. If he had come from the other, he must have alighted on the opposite side of the same passage.'

'True, true.'

I admired the sagacity of our companion, and from that moment I felt confidence in her power to extricate us from our awkward situation.

(To be continued.)

THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW WE ALL MADE OURSELVES USEFUL ACCORDING TO OUR ABILITY.

THE trap into which we had fallen could not have been set long, for the grass-roots hanging from the roof were still fresh. The floor was smooth and very clean. There was a round hole in the centre, and I thought to myself that this would be the only spot through which we could hope to escape—at least, that I could; for the spider could easily go up with the aid of a thread to one or the other entrance of the broken gallery. She might even take the glowworm with her, but as for me, I was much too heavy; and even supposing the thread to be strong enough to bear me, I felt that it would be quite impossible for me to climb it, for I was not accustomed to that kind of exercise, nor was I so constituted as to be able to attempt it with any chance of success.

I approached the hole alluded to, and began to remove the earth which stopped it up. This did not take long, for my claws soon came in contact with an insurmountable obstacle, and I discovered with horror that the pot rested on a stone, so that it was quite impossible to get out that way.

'You must know,' observed the spider, 'that the trap being set for mole crickets, who can burrow in the ground with the greatest ease, it was absolutely necessary to take that preliminary precaution to prevent them from escaping through the hole.'

'But how ever am I to get out?'

'Leave that to me,' added the spider, 'that's my business. The first thing to be decided is, which of the two passages you will take. For my part, I think it will be imprudent to go back to the one through which we came. We might run into the very jaws of the mole. I am disposed to give the preference to the other. We don't know where it goes to; but it seems to be the safer of the two. What do you think?'

'I am quite of your opinion.'

'And you, Firefly?'

'I agree with you too. I place myself entirely under your guidance.'

'Well, as we are of one mind, let's set to work without delay.'

As she spoke, the spider threw a thread towards the opening we had chosen, and, having fastened the other end to the ground, she clung to it, and strengthened it with a second. She then went up and down again and again, each time adding one thread to the others, till she considered the kind of rope she had made to be strong enough. That done, she spun a second thread parallel with and at a short distance from the first, strengthening it in the same fashion. I watched her at work with an interest which will be readily understood. When she had finished her two parallel ropes, she connected them by cross-threads laid horizontally.

'Ah!' I cried, 'a ladder!'

'What do you think of my idea?'

'It's brilliant, and I admire your ingenuity.'

'You see,' she went on, 'I did well to cling to you in our flight. Your speed saved me, and one good turn deserves another. Firefly helps us too, for without his lamp we could not see how to make our escape.'

All the time she was talking the spider was working away at her web with extraordinary zeal, and it was very soon completed.

'Now then, forwards!' she cried joyfully. 'But wait a minute, whilst I carry up Firefly, it won't take an instant, and you will see better how to climb up.'

The glowworm's ascent was the work of a moment, and once up he settled on the edge of the pot near the passage, against which rested the ladder, and turned his lamp round so as fully to light it up.

I began to ascend. The spider had had the forethought to fasten a strong thread round my body, the other end of which she had fastened to one of the beams of the ceiling. By its means she hoisted me up, and with this assistance I managed without too much difficulty to reach the last round of the ladder. We were now all three together on the upper edge of the pot, ready to enter the unknown passage, at the farther end of which we hoped to find ourselves in safety.

The passage was too narrow for us to march abreast, and after a short consultation it was decided that Firefly should lead the way and light our steps. I was to follow, to overturn any obstacles which should present themselves, and the spider was to bring up the rear.

'Let us agree how to act in case of an alarm,' I said: 'so that we may not lose our presence of mind. You, Epeira' (it will be remem-

bered that our companion belonged to that family of spiders)—'you, Epeira, have nothing to fear; we cannot be attacked from behind. If any enemy presents himself, it will be in front; in that case, Firefly, turn round at once and slip behind me. I undertake to bear the brunt of the attack. As the best armed and the strongest of us three, that duty devolves on me.'

Truth to tell, I made a mental reservation when I suggested this order of march, which it would never have done to confide to my companions. We might wander about a long time in these subterranean passages without food, or the possibility of procuring any; in a word, Firefly was a feeble creature, and spiders have bad reputations. Thus far our companion had been very kind to him, she had saved his life in our precipitous flight, and I liked to be lieve that her motive was gratitude for the service which had been rendered to her by him, rather than a wish to secure a necessary light. Still, hunger is imperative and a bad counsellor—at least, with some natures; and who could tell that we might not soon be enduring the pangs of famine?

By sending Firefly in advance, and making the spider go behind, I protected the latter from the danger of committing in a moment of oblivion an act on every account to be deprecated.

Everything was settled according to my suggestions; the glowworm led the way and entered the passage, I followed him, and the spider followed me. We went on for some little time in silence. The passage, though wide enough for me to walk with comfort, was not sufficiently so for me to be able to turn round, should occasion arise for doing so. It was very tortuous and uneven, and it

seemed to me to slope very much to the left, though its irregularity made it difficult to determine its exact direction.

We had been walking thus for some minutes when, in crossing a

spot where the earth was rather loose, one of my legs sank right in, and, the ground suddenly giving way beneath me, I was flung with the loose soil into a hollow which was fortunately not



very deep. At the cry I gave as I fell Firefly hurried back, and we were able to make out the cause of the accident. I had fallen into a vast gallery, which here ran under our passage, from which it was only separated by a thin layer of earth, and this layer had

been broken by the weight of my body.

The same idea struck us all at once. This vast gallery was one of the mole's roads.

It was dangerous and altogether useless to linger where we were. With the aid of my comrades I

therefore regained the passage, a work of little difficulty, and we resumed our march.

A fresh *contretemps*, and one of a more disagreeable nature, however, occurred a little further on. Our passage, after turning abruptly to the left, led into the very gallery into which I had fallen.

We stopped and consulted as to what had better be done. The spider carefully examined the place, and appeared to reflect.

'It is evident,' she said presently, 'that the mole cricket did not pierce her passage as we find it to-day, or make it lead into this gallery, for fun. The latter is probably of more recent construction, and the passage has been cut across. We shall doubtless find its continuation in the wall opposite to us.'

This supposition seemed reasonable. After having listened for some time to make sure that the gallery was empty, I therefore followed the direction of the passage, which here described an acute angle, and I examined the opposite wall, expecting to find a little opening in it. I was disappointed, and told my companions so.

'You must be mistaken,' said the spider. 'Come, we can easily find out the right way to go. Here, Firefly, turn round and go back.'

Firefly did as he was requested, and just as he was disappearing round the next corner the spider cried, 'Stop!'

The gallery was absolutely dark, except for a luminous spot on the wall opposite to the one against which we stood. The spider pointed out the spot to me, and said,

'There, that is where we ought to find the continuation of our passage. Dig there, cricket.'

I set to work, but in vain I dug

and burrowed in the ground, sinking into it up to my shoulders; no hollow did I find.

It seemed probable that at the place to which we had penetrated the passage made a turn, and followed the same direction as the mole's gallery. In that case it was useless to hunt for it any longer; there was nothing to be done but to follow the gallery itself, in spite of the unpleasant encounters we might expect in it.

These reflections, which the spider made *sotto voce*, and as it were aside, were shared by myself.

Such was the situation when rapid footsteps were heard in the gallery a little distance off.

'Quick, to the passage!' cried the spider, clutching at my tail.

But before reaching it I was knocked down by some animal running rapidly past. It was a little field mouse, and judging by the increased speed of its flight, I think its terror on striking me was no less than ours.

'What a shock! I thought it was a shrew.'

'Come,' said the spider, 'let's follow him; there is nothing else to be done. As long as he does not turn back we may make sure that the passage is free to him, and there will be no fear of our walking blindly into the jaws of a mole. If he passes again we will take counsel together. Come, Firefly.'

I was struck by the justice of the spider's supposition, and with him and the glowworm clutching on to the two ends of my tail for the sake of advancing more rapidly, I set off at a trot, as the width of the path allowed of my adopting that pace.

Presently I stopped to take breath, saying,

'Have you any idea of the time?'

'It is breakfast time!' sighed

Firefly sadly.

That was exactly my own opinion, but the mole cricket was no longer there to get us food. Before we could breakfast we must get out of this interminable subterranean passage.

'Forward, my friends!'

I resumed my course, still towing my companions. We soon came to a bifurcation of the gallery. I again stopped.

'We will follow the trace of the field mouse, that will be our best way,' said the spider.

As she spoke she carefully examined the ground. I saw her enter first one and then the other of the two galleries before her, then she called the glowworm, and begging him to make his lamp shine more brightly, she continued her examination, walking slowly and appearing undecided.

'Well!' I inquired.

'It is strange,' she said, 'that the animal's track has been single, but now the traces of its passage are numerous and confused in both branches of the gallery. I think he must have met with some obstacle in one of the passages, and turned back to try the other. That of course would be simple enough, but what complicates the matter is that he has apparently been unable to advance in the second either. The mouse seems to have run backwards and forwards several times in both of the paths before us.'

'What do you gather from that?'

'I really don't know what to think.'

'Might there not be a mole in one of the passages?'

'No; the mouse would not have run against it a second and a third time.'

'What shall we do?'

'We will go on at all risks. What other course is open to us? Perhaps what was an insurmountable obstacle to the mouse would

not be so to us. First of all we have light; and secondly, we are so much smaller that we might slip through where he could not. Let's go to the left, the path seems to lead up, and we want to get towards the surface of the ground.'

We took the path on the left, but we did not go far. At a little distance from its opening the passage ended in a blind alley. We retraced our steps and tried the other. That led down rather abruptly, and we had not been in it a minute before an unexpected obstacle brought us up short, and at the same time explained the running backwards and forwards of the mouse, of which the marks on the ground gave proof. The gallery was full of water—a fact easily explained by the nature of the soil, which consisted of compact impermeable clay. The water was probably part of the heavy rain which had fallen a few nights before. We exchanged looks of great disappointment.

'If the gallery continues to slope downwards,' said the spider, 'the water must reach nearly to the top. But if it goes up a little distance from here, perhaps we can pass.'

'It seems to me,' I said, 'that where the mouse has passed we may do the same. Don't you think so?'

'Yes, of course, if the mouse has passed at all, but that remains to be proved.'

'If he had retraced his steps, we should have met him.'

'He may have turned round whilst we were in the passage on the left. In any case I am going to see how the matter stands. Wait for me here.'

With this the spider spun a thread above the water towards the roof of the passage, and we soon saw her disappear in the darkness, clinging to it.

Some little time elapsed before

she returned. At last she reappeared.

'We can pass,' she said; 'the gallery runs up further on. The passage will be rather difficult towards the middle, but it is practicable, which is the main point. You're not afraid of getting wet?'

'Not a bit,' we replied.

'But how about your lamp,

Firefly—is there any danger of its going out?'

'Not the least; it's proof against submersion.'

'All is well, then, and this is what we have to do. You, Firefly, clutch hold of the cricket's shoulders, and don't let go whatever happens. As for you, cricket, I am going to fasten a thread



round your neck, and at a signal I shall give you are to go into the water until you are out of your depth. Leave the rest to me. Only take care when you are floating to draw your limbs together, so as not to risk striking against the walls of the passage. If such a *contretemps* should occur, the thread by which I mean to pull you up might break, and that would lead to complications.'

Everything was done according to the instructions of the spider. She then suspended herself to the thread which she had spun along the top of the passage, and at the word 'forwards' pronounced by her I entered the water, through which I walked as long as I felt any ground beneath my feet. That

soon failed me, and I then drew up my legs and held my breath. The washing of the water against my body showed me that we were advancing, towed by the spider. For one moment I seemed to glide to the bottom and to remain stationary. I thought the thread had broken, and you can imagine the terror which seized me. Fortunately, however, my anxiety did not last long. I again felt the thread dragging me on, and a few instants afterwards I was able to put my feet to the ground. We were soon out of the water.

'What was the matter in the middle of the journey?' I inquired of the spider. 'I thought for a minute that we should not get to the other side.'

'One of the fastenings of my thread to the ceiling gave way, and I fell into the water myself. I managed to repair the mischief, though, and the dangerous transit is effected.'

Meanwhile the glowworm, whose lamp did not appear to have suffered from its wetting, was examining the ground.

'The mouse got over the difficulty too,' he said, 'here are the marks of his feet; they can be seen quite easily.'

Beyond this point the gallery continued to lead up.

'I noticed,' observed the spider, 'that where the water had got in the roof of the passage was not of earth, but of stone. The mole probably had to burrow

beneath it in order to pass it.'

We resumed our march. The footprints of the mouse, which were very clearly visible on the ground, encouraged us to hope that we should meet with no further obstacles.

This hope soon became certainty. In a few minutes we reached the end of our gallery, which we found led into a large subterranean chamber, to which the daylight penetrated. It was a rabbit-burrow, the entrance to which we could see a little distance off. We got out quickly enough, and it was with a feeling of intense relief that we gazed once more on the sun, then appearing in full glory above the horizon.



CHAPTER VIII.

A LESSON IN APPLIED GEOMETRY

'THE next thing to be done is to get some breakfast,' said the spider. 'I shall spin a web at once on this currant-bush. Where shall I meet you again?'

'Here, of course. Don't you think that will be best? Firefly and I will go and look for food. In a quarter of an hour at the most we shall have satisfied our hunger, and then we will come back to you.'

'All right. I'll throw a thread from my web to that blade of grass near you. When you are back you can shake it to let me know, and I'll come to you.'

With that the spider went her way and Firefly hid, whilst I remained at the entrance to the burrow to look about me, and ascertain whereabouts we were.

The result of my inspection was as follows. The burrow was situated on the borders of a wood growing on a little hill behind me. Before me and a short distance off was a strawberry-bed, sloping gently down to the wide path where I had narrowly escaped being crushed by a carriage the evening of my arrival. Beyond gleamed the waters of the pond. On the left and on a rather lower level I could see the iron gate through which I had made my entrance into the grounds. From the commanding position which I occupied I could see the whole of the house in the distance on the right. It was a fine building, with a flight of steps leading up to it, a verandah, and a turret on either side, surmounted by a weathercock.

It was not difficult to make out the exact spot where I had met the mole cricket, and where also

the entrance to her house was situated. The prolonged stay I had made there during the preceding days had rendered me familiar with all the surrounding objects. There was no doubt that it was down there, beside that bit of white stone on the edge of the path. We had traversed a great distance underground, and I congratulated myself on the fortunate termination of our adventure. This reflection suggested another, and I could not help laughing at the remembrance of the circular journey of an hour's duration which I had made in the gardener's trap.

Above me the spider was busily making her web. That reminded me that it was time I had some food. A few tender blades of grass soon appeased my hunger. That done, I espied a stone with a little hollow beneath it, and having assured myself that I could retreat to this natural refuge in case of necessity, I set myself down close to it, and watched the spider at work.

I had often seen spiders making their webs, but I had never before noticed how they set about the production of their first thread. I had now a good opportunity of satisfying my curiosity on that point. I therefore thus accosted my friend.

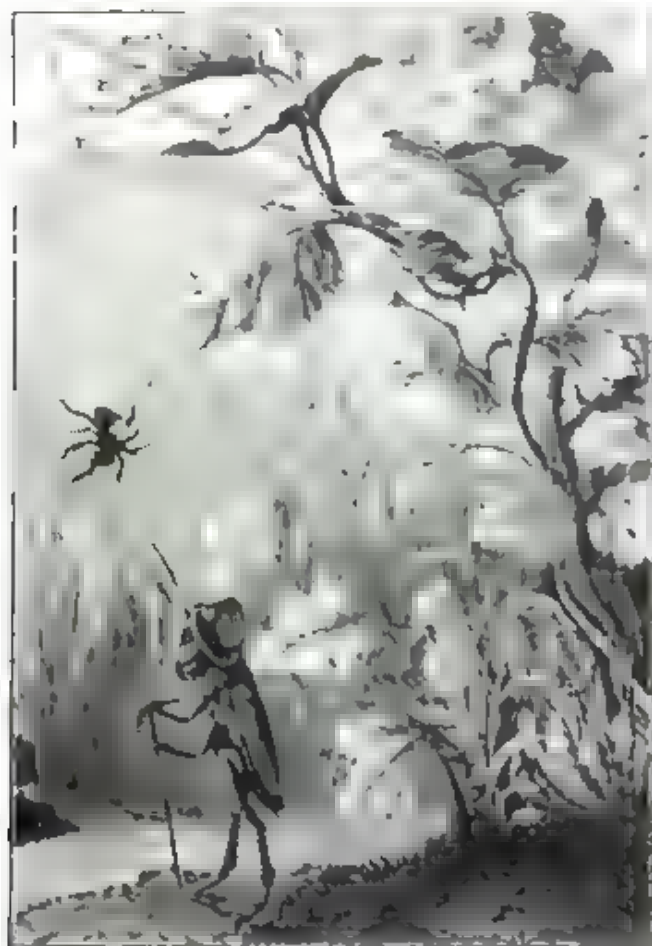
'Epeira,' I cried, 'just explain how it is that, though you were beside me a minute ago, you have managed to fasten a thread to that currant-bush without first climbing on to it?'

'Nothing could be easier,' she replied. 'First of all, you must know that in the end of my body I have a little sack filled with a

liquid, which instantaneously dries when I exude it, and is converted into long silken threads. Before it reaches the air, however, it has to pass through a great number of minute orifices. The thread which

looks to you single really consists of some hundreds of threads of extreme tenuity, which as they leave my body adhere and form the one you see.

Moreover, I can produce an



many fine threads from my spinnerets as I choose. When I want to stretch the first I make it invisible, and so light that it floats in the air at the mercy of the very faintest breeze. I spin it rapidly till it is of a great length, and soon its free end attaches itself to some

object, often at a great distance off. That done, I tighten this first thread, and from it I seek about for some other place to fasten the second. I proceed in the same manner with the third. I dispose them in the form of a triangle. I need not say that when my first

thread is stretched I strengthen it with others, and that I do so as I climb along it. When my large triangle is once formed, I cut off the angles by oblique threads to form a polygon, and it is within this polygon that I make the radii, and lastly the spiral which binds them together.'

I thanked the spider for her explanation. I had not quite understood the terms triangle, polygon, and spiral which she had used, but as I watched her at work I guessed their meaning. I had learnt what I most wished to know—how she managed to produce her first thread. Satisfied with my lesson, I began to sing to pass the time. I had just finished my third or fourth shake when I heard a voice from beneath the stone. I listened. It seemed as if some one were calling to me.

'Cricket!' murmured a stifled voice, 'Cricket!'

I drew back into the hollow and listened again.

'Cricket!'

The cry was more distinct.

'Who is there?' I said. 'Who calls me?'

'An unfortunate staphylinus buried alive and dying of hunger. Come and help me.'

'How can I help you?'

'By piercing a passage in the direction of my voice. I beseech you, for Heaven's sake, to do me this service.'

I hesitated for a moment. I had little enough in common with the staphylinidae family. I did not think much of their restless, impudent, quarrelsome, and unsociable ways. However, my own happy and recent escape from a painful situation made me sympathise with the misfortunes of others. So my hesitation did not last long, and I began to burrow in the ground behind my hollow

in the direction from which proceeded the voice of the staphylinus.

I reached him in a few minutes. I then made my way out backwards, and he lost no time in following me.

'Thank you,' he said, as he came out; 'you have rendered me a signal service. But for you I should have perished with hunger beneath that stone.'

'How ever did you get there?'

'O, it's my home, and I, like a fool, allowed myself to be shut up in it. Three days ago a quantity of earth was drifted against my door in a violent shower. When I saw my danger it was already too late to escape. I was blocked in. I tried to get out, but it was of no use, for I am not able to burrow in the ground. I had lost all hope of ever again seeing the light of the sun, when your song struck upon my ear.'

I looked at the staphylinus as he spoke. He was of good height, of a dull bluish-black colour, strongly built, and armed with a pair of pretty formidable mandibles.

'You seem exhausted,' I observed.

'I am quite done up,' he replied, in a voice which betrayed his weakness. 'I should be very glad of something to eat.'

'What is your usual food?'

'Larvæ, worms, and that sort of thing. But I really think at this present moment I could manage anything.'

'Well, look under that strawberry-bush down there. I saw a slug there just now, which will be the very thing for you.'

He did not need twice telling, but ran to the spot I pointed out. Suddenly a great fear seized me, and I followed him till I saw him find the slug and bury his jaws in its back. I then re-

turned with my mind more at ease. My fear had been that he might perhaps meet our friend Firefly: in his famished condition he would have made but one mouthful of our poor comrade.

I went on with my singing.

Not knowing what to do with myself after an hour of this amusement, I went to see if the spider had had good sport. She was

motionless in the centre of her web, the absolute integrity of which proved that she was still waiting for her breakfast. This did not surprise me. The sun, now at the zenith of its course, was shining brilliantly in a cloudless sky, all Nature seemed asleep, and not so much as a midge was stirring anything. Now and then a wasp or a bee flew rapidly past,



but the rustling of their wings alone broke the universal silence.

'Ah, ah!' I thought to myself, 'it's not much breakfast you'll get, and your dinner won't be caught either in a hurry. However, you are blessed with both patience and craft. I wish you good luck.'

Reflecting thus I resumed my walk.

I followed the borders of the wood already referred to. Between it and the strawberry-bed which stretched away beneath me on the left was a neglected kind of paddock, in which grew tufts of heather, coarse grass, and a few furze-bushes. The soil was dry, barren, and sandy. The place seemed to be uninhabited, and except for half a dozen grass-

hoppers and a few ants not a living creature was to be seen. The grasshoppers were of the variety with gray bodies and blue under-wings. They came to me as soon as they saw me, and bade me welcome.

Grasshoppers, as of course you know, are our cousins-german, and we have always been on very good terms with them. There is a great family likeness between us. To be quite accurate, however, I must own that they are in some points our superiors; they have more elegance, more grace, an easier carriage, and more vivacity than we crickets. They cultivate music with enthusiasm, and consider themselves proficient in the art. I must observe,

though, that there is a great monotony about their style—a want of expression, which ends by becoming wearisome to susceptible ears. They have one particularly harsh shrill note, in which they indulge to excess. I hasten to add that this is merely my private opinion. I do not pretend to be expressing the general verdict. I am myself an artist, naturally disposed to think my own style preferable to any other, so that I am a little open to the charge of prejudice. I shall, I hope, be pardoned for this criticism on my big cousins, considering how frankly I have admitted their undeniable superiority in other respects.

'Ah, it was you we heard just now,' cried one of them. 'You puzzled us very much. To what lucky chance are we indebted for the pleasure of seeing you in these parts?'

I related my adventures of the preceding days in a few words, and told them my reasons for exiling myself from my family. They listened with great apparent interest and sympathy.

I was just turning away, when I saw a kind of cricket of huge size advancing towards us.

'Who is that enormous creature?' I asked, astonished at the appearance of the new-comer.

'It is a stranger,' was the reply. 'He dropped amongst us from the sky the other day. He says he comes from a long distance, and his talk is very strange; he tells such stories—'

'I tell you nothing but what is true,' haughtily replied the stranger, who had now approached near enough to hear my cousin's last words.

'Come, come, don't be angry,' observed one of the latter, laughing; 'but own frankly that you only meant to hoax us yesterday with your extraordinary history.'

'Not at all,' answered the stranger quickly. 'I have travelled hundreds of miles, swept along by a hurricane which carried me off from amongst my companions.'

'You hear what he says?' the cricket whispered to me; adding, in a louder voice, 'And your traveling companions were very numerous, were they not?'

'There were thousands of millions of us, and as we flew we formed a cloud several miles in length and breadth, darkening the light of the sun, and spreading terror in the countries over which we passed. Once a cannon was fired at us.'

Hearing the stranger seriously narrate such extraordinary things, I gave my cousins a look of surprised inquiry, and one of them, as he met my eyes, raised his foot to his forehead.

At this significant gesture, combined probably with the expression of my face, they burst with one accord into a roar of laughter and ran off in all directions, leaving me alone face to face with the giant.

I did not feel at all comfortable.

'Insolent creatures!' he thundered. 'Ignorant fools, who have never seen anything but these tufts of heather beneath which they were born! They have nothing but incredulity and mockery for those who know more than themselves.'

'Well,' I observed, 'it must be owned that what you have just told us is extraordinary and, pardon the word, just a little improbable.'

'Is that any reason why it should not be true? I have merely stated a fact. What interest had I in making them believe it?'

'None whatever, of course.'

'You seem more sensible, cric-

ket; you do not take me for an impostor.'

'Of course not, of course not,' I answered hurriedly. 'But as for them, you must make excuses; they are but giddy things.'

I was not altogether at my ease, truth to tell, at finding myself alone with this creature, whose mind might really, for all I knew, be deranged. So after bowing to him as politely as I could, I took my leave.

In thinking over this meeting, I recollected having once heard of a family of grasshoppers known as migratory grasshoppers or locusts, who are in the habit of travelling from country to country in vast numbers. Perhaps the one I was leaving was a stray member of that race.

After ten minutes' walk I came to a place where a path from the wood cut across the uncultivated paddock and brought it to a sudden termination. On either side of this path was a steep bank on which nothing grew. The upper edge of the bank consisted of a network of old heather-roots, overhanging the path in such a manner that from the advanced point I had reached I commanded a view of a considerable extent. I stopped perforce. There was no need for me to go any further, and I was about to return as I had come when my attention was attracted by something which surprised me extremely, and held me rooted to the spot.



(To be continued.)

THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER IX.

SHOWING HOW TRAVELLING IMPROVES THE MIND.

At the top of the bank opposite to me, and immediately beneath the kind of hedge I have just described, a little cloud of dust rose from time to time at regular intervals. A succession of slight explosions was taking place; at least, such was at first the effect upon me. Reflection convinced me that this phenomenon was produced by some living creature occupied in a work the object of which I could not make out. My curiosity was vividly excited, and, unable to resist its promptings, I determined to go and examine more closely what so puzzled me.

Having carefully noted the spot I must reach to watch the phenomenon at my ease, I let myself slide down the bank beneath me, and having quickly reached the bottom, I proceeded to climb the one opposite to me.

It was not without some trouble that I gained the top—that is to say, the part of the bank immediately beneath the ledge formed by the hardened soil and the roots of plants, a kind of rounded overhanging cornice which it was of course impossible for me to scale. It would, moreover, have been useless to go higher; for I was now on the same level and within easy reach of the spot from which had recently proceeded the clouds of dust of which I was anxious to ascertain the cause.

I had been waiting a few instants when a fresh explosion showed me the exact spot where the work was going on, but I could still make out nothing. Several minutes passed and there

was no sign of life. Yet, according to my own calculations, I must be close to the miner. Had he seen me? That was scarcely likely; for if he had, I must have seen him. It was more likely that, having become aware of my approach from the slight noise made by the rolling down of the sand beneath my feet as I climbed up, he was prudently keeping quiet. This appeared the more probable as the silence was so profound that the very slightest sound would have been heard. I had noticed before going down into the path that the clouds of sand rose just beneath a tuft of thyme, the flowering stems of which gave a touch of rosy colour to the otherwise leaden hue of the brow of the bank. The tuft of thyme stood out against the sky a little distance off. Guided by this trustworthy sign I crept along slowly and noiselessly. 'It must be here,' I said to myself, as I came to the edge of a perfectly round hole like a funnel. 'This hollow is not the work of chance. But where on earth is the workman?'

Not a trace of any living creature was to be seen anywhere. The solitude was complete. I approached the hole, and admired the symmetry of its proportions and the exquisite regularity of the banks, forming an inclined plane finished off with the greatest care. I noticed that the banks were formed of quite soft earth, a fact I verified by plunging one of my feet into it.

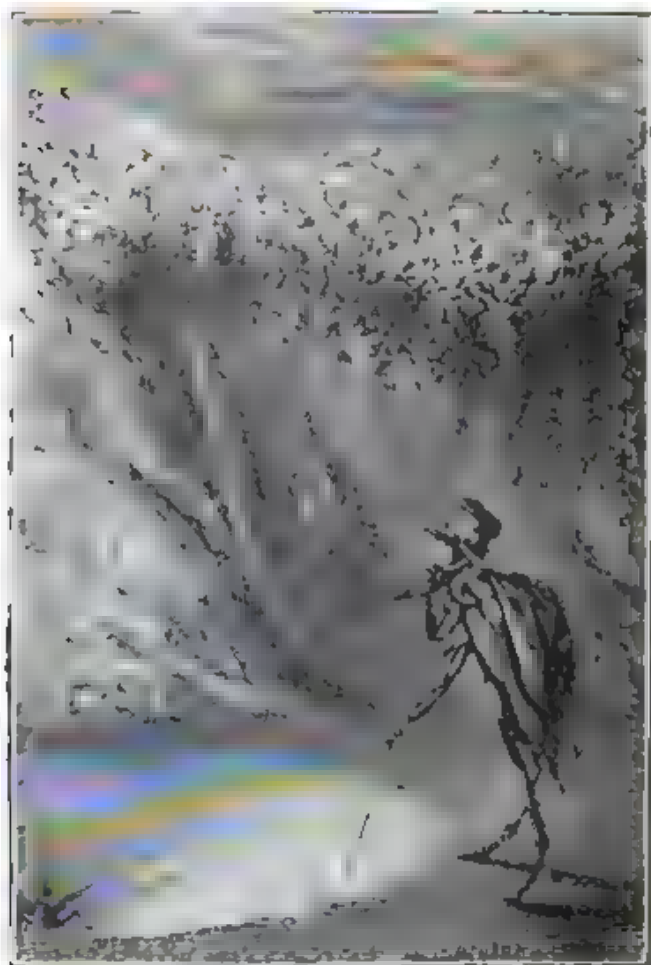
Whilst I was making my examination a voice, which appeared

to come from beneath me, suddenly ejaculated a vehement oath, and in an angry tone apostrophised me as follows

‘Out of the way, up there; off with you, you clumsy fellow, don’t

you see you are spoiling my work?’

At the same moment a little head armed with two huge mandibles appeared above the sand at the very bottom of the funnel, and



glared at me with anything but a mild expression.

I confess that this sudden apparition and the speech which accompanied it gave me a sensation greatly akin to fear. I have already owned that I am nervous, and I do not like surprises. I consider myself pretty brave when I am

face to face with an enemy, even if he is stronger than I am; but I repeat I do not like surprises. It is a case of natural temperament.

My fright was, however, of short duration. I was reassured when I saw how very small was the head from which proceeded the

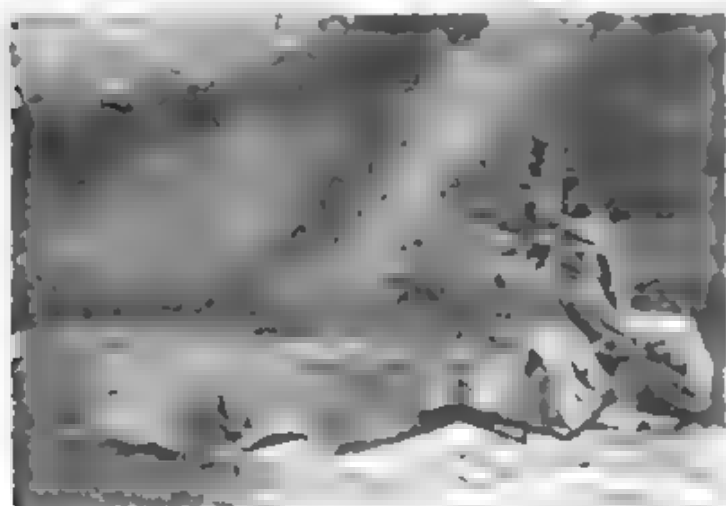
them repeated above, and I looked at it repeatedly.

“Why, then, did the new comers pry into it—do you think you shall know the secret?” I then turned out our own business, and leave me to think mine.

When I heard the strange creature returned me to let him attend to his business, I wondered whatever he could have to do at

the bottom of a hole which he had apparently made himself.

“Fare you (good),” I said to him, and went on my morning march, not perceiving if I have got you out of the hole, and because that I had no intention of doing so. I have since you were there, I tried to see you at the bottom of that hole, but which you have just been taken by accident. I will



help you out of it.

“This personage, which I only made to appear him had the shadow of a foot. I made him laugh.”

“But he replied in a faint but a strong tone. I made that tone myself, and I am at the bottom of it. It is because it costs me to be there.”

“You are making fun of me. I do believe. How can I credit your having dug out such a hole low as this now, if and that with out any delicate motion?”

“Whether you were it or not, the fact remains the same. I have made that hole by myself, and I have made it for a very delicate reason.”

I felt sure he was speaking the truth, for the cricket of holes. I

had seen from a distance were now completely lost. But how could a cricket make a hole so deep as a foot, and what was its object? I was standing outside the hole.

“Still, you know what you say,” I replied. “But will you be good as to tell me what was your purpose in making this hole of mine?”

“I have no reason for making a mystery of it,” he replied. “I feel upon strong proof that I have a special favor to ask.” “You they are faster than I am. I am too slow, I walk backward. I shall go to the bottom of the hole, and then I shall be free for them.”

I understood. I answered

'when they tumble into your funnel you spring upon them before they have time to get out again.'

'Wrong again, Cricket. I can't jump any better than I can walk. This is what I do.'

At that my little friend first drew back his head, and then jerking it suddenly forwards he discharged such a volley of grains of sand at me as would have knocked me down had I not been strong enough to withstand the charge.

'There,' he said, 'that's how I receive the ants whose ill luck leads them to my door. I bring them to my feet without any trouble with my shower of sand. When I have sucked their bodies dry with my maxillæ or minor jaws, which you see are specially fitted for the purpose, I jerk their crushed carcasses away in the same style, and await a fresh victim.'

I was astonished. But suddenly a recollection shot across my mind.

'Are you not an ant-lion?' I cried.

'Of course I am.'

'Ah, I heard of such creatures in my childhood, though I don't remember when or from whom, but your mode of life is not unknown to me. I have been told of your wonderful way of catching ants and making them roll down a precipice by pelting them with sand, but I had forgotten all about it. Listen a minute—you will change your appearance some day; you will have wings and hover in the air like butterflies and dragon-flies, will you not?'

'Just so; that is to be my future fate. Presently I shall make myself a solid cocoon of sand, in which I shall pass about a fortnight without eating and in a state of immobility. During that time my metamorphosis will be imperceptibly going on; my

wings will grow, and I shall have nothing to do when I wake but to split open the simple costume I now wear, and to gnaw through the cocoon which will have protected me during my transformation. I shall then spread my wings and joyfully take my flight through the air. You see that if my present condition of life is wretched there is a more brilliant experience in store for me in the future. I think of it in the long hours of inaction to which my present mode of existence condemns me, and the thought does not fail to console me in my daily misery. I think of it too when I am laboriously constructing my trap. Life would be very hard but for the hope of a happier future.'

'Of course, of course; you reason as men do, friend ant-lion, and I should be glad to think that the ants you massacre daily console themselves in the same way when you hold them between your jaws and suck out all their juices. But tell me now how you manage to dig your funnel. I should be very much obliged if you would show me how you go to work.'

The ant-lion made no immediate reply to this request, and I saw that he was looking at me furtively.

'Perhaps I am presuming too much,' I said, 'you have interested me so much already that I am very anxious to complete my knowledge of your mode of life. I like to improve myself, and I should be sorry to leave you without having this one gap filled up in the extraordinary narrative you have given me.'

'Listen to me,' replied the ant-lion, 'and I will tell you frankly what made me at first hesitate to comply with your wishes. My weakness makes me distrustful, and I am afraid that if I leave my refuge—'

'Can you imagine for one moment that I harbour any evil intentions towards you? Crickets, Heaven be praised, have never had the reputation of being either knaves or traitors. I hunt, I confess, but,' I added, proudly drawing myself up, 'it is in broad daylight, and without the use of artifices unworthy of our race. If, as you seem to suppose, I had had any intention of injuring you,

would there have been any need for me to entice you out when I could easily have butchered you at the bottom of your hole?'

In thus indicating my chivalrous character I forgot, as one is apt to do sometimes, that the qualities on which I prided myself were just those in which my interlocutor, who lived by stratagem, was wanting. He was not hurt by my tirade, however, but seemed



struck by the force of my last argument.

'You are right,' he replied, 'pardon my hesitation, I rely implicitly upon your good faith.'

With that he proceeded to climb the bank of his funnel, which he soon accomplished. I now saw him as a whole for the first time, as until then his head and mandibles alone had been visible.

He was a very strangely constructed little creature. His body, of about the size of my head, was of a dull-grayish colour, and seemed

feeble. His thorax was small in proportion, and so was his head, which was flattened at the top. From it, as I have already said, sprang two long thin sickle-shaped mandibles serrated on the inner edges. His gait was most extraordinary. He did not walk on his feet as we all do, but curving the lower portion of his body, and clinging with it to the sand, he drew himself backwards in jerks. He did not show the whole of his body above ground, but remained half buried in the sand, leaving a

pretty deep furrow behind as he went along. I followed it closely. When he was a little distance from his hole, he informed me that he was going to begin his operations. I then saw him mark out a circular furrow of a diameter equal to three times the length of my body, or from ten to twelve times that of his own. I admired the perfect regularity with which he described this circle, which he must have done, however, by instinct, for he could not see it, buried as he was in the sand. I have said that he moved in jerks. I must add that at every step he took his head, which he held down, was flung up, as if moved by a spring, throwing off the sand with which it was covered. I now again observed the peculiar little explosions, which had puzzled me so much when I first noticed them from the top of the other bank.

'You now see how I go to work,' the ant-lion observed to me presently, as he paused from his labour; 'it's needless to do any more, because I go on just as you have seen, except that I gradually contract my circle as my hole grows perfect. It's a hard task, I can tell you.'

I asked him how long it took him to finish his trap.

'An hour at least,' was the reply; 'and if it is not well placed I catch nothing, and have to make another. Sometimes too it is destroyed by accident, and all my work has to be done over again. Fortunately,' he added, 'I have not to endure this life of toil much longer. I have attained my full size, and I shall soon shut myself up in my cocoon, to undergo my metamorphosis.'

I thanked the ant-lion warmly for the readiness with which he had satisfied my curiosity, and in taking leave of him I said a few words of congratulation on the subject of his approaching transformation which appeared to gratify him.

I now prepared to go down the bank, delighted at having extended my walk so far. Just here the bank was almost perpendicular, and I hesitated a few seconds as to whether I should jump into the path or return by the easier way by which I had come. This hesitation, by slightly delaying my departure, was very near being fatal to me, as will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER X.

A CATASTROPHE.

Of the two courses open to me, I chose the second. I turned to the right, and, following the base of the cornice mentioned above, I reached the spot where the bank, sloping gently down, rendered my descent easy.

I neglected to say that during my conversation with the ant-lion the sky had clouded over. Gradually the air, which had been very hot in the morning, became heavy and oppressive, and the intense stillness of the atmosphere,

in which the foliage of the neighbouring birches and aspens remained absolutely motionless, presaged an approaching storm. Indeed, before I left the shelter afforded me by the overhanging ridge beneath which I was walking, a flash of lightning, followed by a loud clap of thunder, warned me that the tempest was about to break. At the same moment heavy drops of rain began to fall, and the pattering sound made as they fell on the leaves of the

trees increased rapidly, till it became a sound of dull continuous rumble. Presently the ground was deluged with a steady down-pour. Under these circumstances, it was of course impossible to think of going on. I was completely under shelter, so I waited where I was for the storm to blow over. It was only a thunder-shower, which would not last long.

Presently I noticed a little stream of water running along the hollow path beneath me. This stream gradually increased in volume till it became a small torrent, which, following the path, emerged from the wood, crossed the strawberry-bed, and finally flowed into the pond at the bottom of the valley.

The rain still continued to pour down, and soon the water began to trickle from the ridge which protected me, forming a number of parallel trenches on the banks. Protected by the ridge of earth, I was watching the fall of the avalanches with interest, and admiring the foresight of the ant-lion in setting his trap under shelter from the rain, when I suddenly felt wet. I turned round abruptly, and saw water pouring down the wall against which I was leaning. At the same moment some small stones fell from above me, and looking up I observed with terror that, undermined by the damp, the mass of earth forming the roof of my shelter was giving way, and about to fall upon and crush me. Quick as thought I sprang on one side.

Of what followed I have but a confused recollection. I rolled from the top to the bottom of the bank, with stones, sand, and fragments of all kinds, and when I recovered from the shock of the sudden catastrophe, I was being

carried down the stream cheek by jowl with all manner of *debris*, against which I was rolled and jolted. I dimly remember clutching by instinct at some object which was rolling with me down the torrent, and retaining my hold of that object.

Our instinct often leads us to do foolish things for which we have to pay dearly. If I had been in a fit state to reason on the situation in which I found myself, I should most certainly have known better than to grasp at anything harder and larger than myself; for I ran a risk of being crushed by it in the wild leaps we took together.

However, things did not turn out so very badly. After taking a series of somersaults, and shooting a succession of rapids in a space of time which to me appeared of inordinate length, I found myself in stiller waters, and the deafening tumult of which I had just been the victim was replaced by a reassuring silence. I gradually recovered my senses, and I then perceived that the object to which I was clinging was neither more nor less than a fir-cone, with which I had shared the dangerous descent described above.

The fir-cone was floating on the top of the water, and I tried to climb on to the upper side, so as to take breath, of which I was urgently in need, but I soon discovered that that was much more easily said than done. The scales, it is true, made first-rate supports for my feet; but when I tried to hoist myself out of the water, over rolled the cone, and I found myself beneath it. After several attempts with the same results, I thought I would try and climb my very unsteady bark at one of its ends—myself, you understand, representing the axis

on which it turned. By this means I succeeded not only in gaining the top, but in remaining upon it, a very difficult gymnastic feat, as you may imagine.

It was with a feeling of intense

relief that I found myself in this improved situation, which, if not even yet altogether satisfactory, was certainly incomparably preferable to that from which I had emerged. I had thought myself



lost, and it was really nothing short of a miracle that I had kept all my limbs intact in my terrible adventure. The first thing I did was to draw breath again and again; the second, to look about me, and take stock of my present position.

I was floating in the middle of

a vast sheet of water almost completely enclosed by a sloping lawn, which was dotted here and there with clumps of shrubs. I knew this pond well; it was in the park I had entered at the beginning of my travels. I had seen it in the distance at the bottom of the valley on this very morning when

I was looking about me from the edge of the wood. Yes, there was the little wood, and beyond it the wild paddock skirting it, beneath sloped away the great strawberry-bed, cut across by the hollow path of which I had just made such a precipitate descent, and below that again ran the road, only separated from the pond by a green bank. Jets of water were still flowing over this declivity, the remains of the stream, which, converted into a torrent by the storm, had made its way across the road to the pond, bringing me with it.

The rain had almost entirely ceased. The sun, now near its setting, was bursting through the clouds, its oblique rays lighting up all the surrounding objects. The storm was over, and the soft air, laden with refreshing scents, gently fanned my face. Flocks of martins, uttering their shrill cries, flew rapidly overhead, and a few swallows skimmed the surface of the pond now and then, just ruffling its waters with the tips of their wings. One of them, flying close to me, almost toppled me off my perch, and their gyrations made me very nervous. It was only with the greatest difficulty that I retained my balance on my fir-cone, in momentary fear that a touch on one side should send me beneath it. At a little distance off I saw a large water-lily leaf, and I thought to myself that if I could but reach it I should be safer and certainly much more comfortable than on my present unsteady support.

When I made my plunge the current of the water quickly carried me away from the borders of the pond; but this current gradually subsided, so that now my fir-cone did not move at all; or if it did, its motion was almost imperceptible.

The storm had raised the level of the pond considerably, and had violently agitated the water. Its surface was strewn with bits of stick, blades of grass, and the dead bodies of insects. Examining these melancholy relics of the tempest, my attention was attracted by a movement in the water near the lily leaf mentioned above. All I could actually see were the circular ripples resulting from the movement, but I guessed that they were produced by some insect struggling perhaps for dear life. I called out several times to attract his attention, and show him which direction he should take, if he were still able to keep himself afloat and to swim. A voice seemed to answer me, but so faintly that the sound hardly reached me. It was evident, however, that I was heard, and that help was needed. But what could I do to assist the poor drowning wretch? In the hope of encouraging him to fresh efforts by the prospect of speedy succour, I redoubled my cries, and an answer came, this time, as it seemed to me, in a voice both louder and less distant. I went on calling, but all the noise I made had a result very different from what I expected. As I stood on tip-toe, trying to make out the poor creature whom I hoped to save, and saying all I could to encourage him, a huge and hideous head suddenly appeared just where the insect should have been, and a great mouth opened and closed with a snap. Then all disappeared again, making a great wave surge up, which reached and all but capsized me. I had witnessed a tragedy. Deeply moved, not only, I confess, with sympathy for the victim, who after all was a stranger to me, but at the thought that I might share his fate, I awaited the reappearance of the

monster, who, you will have guessed, was nothing less than an immense frog. Probably he was even now preparing to spring upon me. I had foolishly attracted his attention by my cries. Selfish fear got the better of me, and I cursed the foolish pity which had actuated me. It was well worth while, I thought, to be troubling myself about the

safety of others when my own life was in such jeopardy.

Whilst I was thus taking myself to task for my generous feelings, I suddenly saw that I was close to the lily-leaf. The eddy produced by the plunge of the frog had, unnoticed by myself, drifted my bark near it. One rapid glance calculated the distance between me and it, and then,



drawing myself together, I sprang upon it.

Evidently things were beginning to mend. My new resting-place was larger and firmer than the other had been, and I was glad to stretch my limbs, stiff as they were from remaining for so many hours in the same position. It was without regret that I watched the fir-cone, which had carried me so long, gradually disappear, drifted away by the recoil after my spring from it. An unfortunate shipwrecked manner does not hesitate to cling to the rock on which he is flung by the waves, even if that rock affords him neither food nor shelter.

My case was somewhat similar. The apparition of the frog had

terrified me, and I had hastened to exchange my far too rickety vessel for a firmer resting-place. The leaf on which I had alighted was large, perfectly smooth, nearly circular, and absolutely deserted. I went round it. I confess it did not offer any special advantages in the way of food, but my first care had been to escape being eaten myself. Like all who are shipwrecked I trusted, to time and some lucky chance to escape sooner or later. What I noticed in the water, which was beginning to become clearer, contributed not a little to add to the feeling of security which now made all my happiness. The pond was peopled with other monsters besides frogs, and once

I saw a very formidable-looking creature appear on the surface of the water. It was taller than I am, but not so stout; and the motion of its body, which was made up of flexible rings of a greenish colour, resembled that of a snake. Its large and powerful head was armed with huge and very sharply-pointed mandibles. It glared at me for a moment with a ferocious expression, which made me shiver. It was certainly no harmless creature. I had never seen anything like it before, and I did not know its name; but I have since ascertained that it was the larva of a dysticus or water-beetle, one of the most formidable inhabitants of the water.

Night was now approaching, and bats soon began to make their appearance. One of them flew very close to me, and I could not fail to recognize that their presence added greatly to the peril of my situation; for, isolated as I

was on the lily-leaf, there was nothing to hide me from these voracious vampires; on the contrary, my black body stood out conspicuously against the monotonous green colour of my raft. What was to be done? I began to despair of escaping from this new danger, when a happy thought suddenly occurred, which I lost not a moment in carrying out. Hastening to the edge of my leaf I seized it between my mandibles, and then drawing it firmly towards me as I leant backwards I bent it nearly double. O, delight! There I saw a juicy mollusc sticking to the under-surface of my raft. To seize it and carry it beneath the cover I had just arranged was the work of a moment. With one stroke I had won my supper, and a roof over my head. Secure now of a quiet night I ate my meal with relish, and then proceeded to take the rest of which I stood so sorely in need. I was soon sound asleep.



THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER XI.

A SIX-FOOTED ROBINSON AND HIS FRIDAY.

THE first half of the night passed over comfortably. Every now and then my leaf was so roughly shaken that I awoke. I did not at first quite know to what to attribute the shakings, but a little thought convinced me that they must have been the result of frogs striking against my raft as they

swam by. But for this everything was quiet about me. Once I had the curiosity to go and see what time it was. So I put my head out from under my impromptu coverlid. It was a beautiful night. Not a breath of air ruffled the surface of the water. The moon, half veiled by gossamer



clouds, shed a bluish light upon the surrounding landscape, of which only the general outlines and most striking features were recognisable. The bats were gone, and with them the danger I had so much dreaded in the evening. With a feeling of intense relief I compared my present security with the terrible crisis when my life had hung by a thread, and I could not sufficiently rejoice at the happy way in which things had turned out. Where were now my companions of the day before!

My position was a strange one. I was provisionally in safety, it is true. I had secured a comfortable residence, which might perhaps, with a little pains, be made even more convenient; chance had stocked my larder, for the mollusc would supply me with food for several days. But after that? I certainly might eat my raft, but apart from the fact that there would be a great sameness about it as a diet, it would not last for ever. The day would come when I should have to stop eating, unless I want-

ed another ducking. I mentally calculated how much of my floor I could sacrifice to my palate without compromising my safety, and the result was that I could subsist for a fortnight. A fortnight! The prospect quite reassured me, for what might not happen to alter the situation in that space of time?

I was reflecting thus when a cry of distress close by struck upon my ear. I looked in the direction from which it came. Something was stirring at the very edge of my raft. I ran to it, as a yet more despairing cry rang out, and there I saw a big ant clutching at my leaf, and vigorously resisting the attempts to drag it away made by some other creature, of which the head alone appeared above the surface of the water.

Yielding without a moment's hesitation to the generous impulses natural to me, I seized the ant by his forelegs, and putting out all my strength flung myself backwards, dragging both him and his enemy, who would not let go, on to the middle of the raft.

The ferocious creature, with whom I was thus disputing his prey, turned out to be the larva of a dytiscus. On finding himself thus suddenly out of his element he dropped the ant, and doubtless thinking I meant to attack him, he anticipated my onslaught by himself turning upon me. I should have been glad to make him understand that I meant him no harm, but it was useless at the moment to attempt to reason with him in his fury, and I had to defend myself. By stepping suddenly aside I prevented him from seizing me by the head, and the huge jaws he opened to their widest extent only closed on one of my forefeet. Fortunately for me these terrible mandibles were not sharp; pointed as they were they could only

pierce, not cut. Blow after blow from my enemy's flexible tail fell upon the lower portion of my body, whilst his pincers still clutched the leg they had seized. My solid armour rendered me invulnerable, as he soon found out; so he changed his tactics, and tried without loosening his hold to push me to the edge of the leaf, so as to make me fall into the water. Once in it I should have been at his mercy. I managed, however, to regain my footing, and as long as I could retain it I had no fear of being shoved off my raft. Unfortunately I am so constituted that I could not use my jaws as a weapon because my neck is so stiff. As long therefore as my assailant held me in his grasp my resistance was purely negative, and the struggle seemed likely to last a considerable time, when, just as I was beginning to despair of victory, an efficient ally came to my aid. At the beginning of the tussle the ant had looked on passively, watching doubtless for the right moment to strike in to my assistance. When she saw my efforts to free myself from my enemy frustrated she felt that the time for her interference had come, and with the courage and intelligence which distinguish her race she flung herself bravely upon the dytiscus, and opening her jaws seized him by the neck.

The neck of the dytiscus larva is very slender, and is only protected by a thin skin. This peculiarity, which enables its owner to turn his head with the greatest ease in every direction, has the corresponding disadvantage of leaving the neck exposed to attack: that is the one flaw in the armour of the dytiscus. The sturdy jaws of the ant met in the neck of the larva and nearly severed it in two. A shudder convulsed the limbs of the monster, and he immediately

let go of me to face this new and unexpected attack, but the ant, without giving him time to rally, completed the work she had so successfully begun with two or three more bites. In a moment the head of the dytiscus was severed from its body, and my decapitated enemy, leaving behind him as a trophy the former important portion of his person, staggered back into his native element, where he probably quickly perished miserably.

This abrupt conclusion of the affray occurred in the very nick of time, for I was completely exhausted.

As I recovered my breath I looked at the ant, whom I had only glanced at when I dragged her from the water. She was of the large species which congregate in great number in the huge piles of twigs which you sometimes see in woods. Though I had never seen them close, for it is dangerous to approach them, I had, as it were, become quite familiar with these famous wood-ants' nest from hearing a bee, a friend of mine, talk of them. The ant before me was very strongly built, but what struck me most at first was that she had been mutilated. One antenna was missing, and its absence was quite a deformity, giving her a very peculiar appearance.

She returned my gaze without speaking, whilst with her forefeet she busied herself in washing her head and jaws, which were still stained with the blood of her enemy.

Between us the mandibles of the dytiscus were still quivering in the last convulsions.

The ant was the first to break the silence.

'You came to my assistance just in time, cricket; but for you I should now be at the bottom of

the water between the pincers before us.'

'And but for your help,' I replied, 'the struggle in which I was engaged might have ended in a similar fate for me.'

'Very possibly; but you would never have begun the struggle but for me, so that I am entirely your debtor. I am most anxious to impress upon you how grateful I am, and I hope we shall always be friends—friends till death. What say you?'

This frank and ready cordiality delighted me, and I accepted the friendship so heartily offered to me without hesitation.

I knew very little about ants then. I had seen them often enough, of course, and I had constantly heard them talked about, for they are a powerful race, and play an important part in the world; but I had never been thrown in contact with them, nor had I felt at all drawn towards them. All that I had heard of them had rather set me against them. Amongst us crickets they have the reputation of being a quarrelsome, wilful, touchy, and hot-tempered race. On the other hand, they are very intelligent, active, and industrious; affectionate towards each other, and full of the most patriotic, or I should rather say parochial, spirit, what Frenchmen call *Chauvinism*. Every branch of the family—and there are many subdivisions—considers itself the first in importance, and this causes a good many civil wars amongst them. I have heard too that they are very far from hospitable, and give anything but a friendly reception to those who approach too near to their settlements. The large wood-ants, to which the one I had by chance come across belonged, are specially noted for this last-named peculiarity. The large towns they in-

habit are enveloped in great mystery; no one dares approach, far less enter, them, for fear of being murdered, and to the actual facts known about them rumour had added all manner of vague sur-

mises, propagated by the winged insects, who alone venture within their precincts. I had my doubts about their inhospitable character even then, and later I learnt that they harbour many guests amongst



them. I also saw cause to modify several other of my preconceived opinions, as will be seen further on.

For the time being, however, I was still under the influence of my prejudices. I could not, nevertheless, repulse the advances of the ant I had saved, especially

under the peculiar circumstances in which we were both situated. I therefore, as already stated, hastened to meet her half-way.

'What accident,' I inquired of her, 'led to your being brought here?'

'I was delayed at a considerable distance from my home by the

storm which, as you know, broke over us yesterday afternoon. When it began to rain I was just entering a hollow path which leads from the broad road to the wood. Constant use had rendered me perfectly familiar with this path. As the rain increased in violence I began to run; but it soon became impossible to advance, and I took refuge under a stone till the shower should be over. I had

not chosen my shelter wisely, for I had not been there a quarter of an hour before a violent torrent overturned my stone and carried me to the pond. For a long time I swam about rather vaguely, for I was half submerged; but I finally climbed on to a water-lily, close to the leaf on which we are now. I intended resting on it for a while, and then quietly to think over the best means of getting



back to dry land. I lost consciousness until the night began to fall, and you can imagine my surprise when I wanted to look out to see the state of weather at finding that the flower had closed upon me, and held me its prisoner.

'I did not mind it so very much, though, knowing that it would be easy enough to get out when I chose; but finding myself in safety in my "box," I determined to pass the night in it, and soon fell asleep.

'When I awoke, imagining that

the sun had risen, I began to gnaw at the wall of my prison, and I very soon made a hole in it; but I was not the first to use the opening thus obtained. It was scarcely begun before water oozed in, filling the calyx of the flower and threatening to drown me if I did not make haste out, which of course I lost not a moment in doing. But my adventures were not yet over.

'For some reason, which I did not at first fathom, but subsequently supposed to have been

the alteration in the level of the pond, the flower in which I had taken refuge was no longer floating on the water, but had become half-submerged. By biting through its leaves I had been the instrument of my own ducking. I swam off, and soon reached this leaf, but just as I clutched at it to climb upon it, I was seized from behind, the lower part of my body being still in the water. Something was trying to drag me down. I clung to the leaf with all my strength, and instinctively cried for help. 'You know the rest.'

'It was lucky for you,' I observed, 'that I happened at that moment to have come out of my shelter to ascertain the time. But for that I should have arrived too late.'

'Just so. I was exhausted, and had your help been ever so little

delayed, I should have been lost. But how did you get here yourself?'

'Much as you did. I was in the same hollow path of which you spoke just now, and the torrent which brought you brought me also to this pond.'

'Now that our mutual curiosity is satisfied, you will, I hope, allow me to satisfy my appetite. I have eaten nothing for a long time, and I am dying of hunger.'

As she spoke the ant went up to the head of the larva she had killed, and set to work to gnaw through the horny outside skin, that she might regale herself on the soft contents of the inside. Leaving her to this agreeable operation, I returned to my leafy coverlet, and resumed my interrupted rest, intending to sleep on until dawn.

CHAPTER XII.

I ACCEPT AN INVITATION.

THE remainder of the night passed over without incident. When I got up again it was broad daylight. The ant, perched on the highest part of the folded leaf, was busy at her toilette, that is to say, she was diligently rubbing her head and every part of her body between her mandibles. I followed her example after wishing her good-morning.

This duty performed, I approached my companion to consult with her on a question of the greatest urgency—namely, how we were to regain the shore.

'That,' she said, 'is the very least of my anxieties. We shall get back to land when the wind rises. Meanwhile let us talk.'

'You know how to get to land?'

'Of course I do.'

'How?'

'O, make your mind easy, and

leave that to me. We shall get to land when we like.'

Her confidence reassured me, and trusting to her ingenuity I said no more on the subject.

We talked of this thing and that; of her home, her fellow-citizens, and her daily occupations. I learnt that she came from the wood on the height, visible from our pond, and that she lived in a colony containing several thousand inhabitants. Moreover, she told me that this colony was not the only one in the neighbourhood, but that there was another of a similar kind and almost equally populous at a little distance off.

'Although the inhabitants of the other colony are of the same species as ourselves,' said the ant, 'we don't think much of them; they are bad neighbours.'

I thought to myself that the

neighbours in question probably said the same of the speaker's colony.

'There are colonies of other ants,' she continued, 'living not far from us, of yellow, black, brown ants, &c. But they are common people, with whom we don't care to associate.'

I told her in my turn, in a few words and without entering into details, what had brought me into these parts.

'Truth to tell,' she observed, 'I was surprised to meet you. You live in families, do you not? But I have never seen or heard of crickets hereabouts.'

'You see before you,' I answered, laughing, 'a regular vagabond, without hearth or home—nothing more or less than an adventurer.'

'What are you going to do when you leave this pond?'

'O,' I said, 'I have a kind of temporary home up there and a few chance acquaintances; but Heaven only knows whether, after yesterday's catastrophe, I shall find either still in existence.'

'It is doubtful certainly; but in any case if you are at a loss I shall be glad if you will come to us.'

At this proposal, which was quite unexpected, I started and stared at the speaker in astonishment. She noticed the expression of my face, and said,

'You seem surprised.'

'Naturally I am.'

'Why so?'

'I have been told, and I have always believed, that strangers were forbidden to enter the colonies of ants under pain of death.'

'It is true,' she replied. 'If you ventured into our neighbourhood alone, you would run a great risk of being cut to pieces; but escorted by me you will be in no danger. We harbour a great many guests.'

'You think your people will receive me?'

'Of course; why not?'

'I have not hesitated to tell you that you have the reputation of being anything but hospitable.'

'Generally speaking we are not. We don't give a very friendly reception to strangers. But you must not suppose that this inhospitality is the result of any blind or systematic prejudice against outsiders. We object to prying, importunate, lazy, and useless intruders, that is all.'

'I am afraid I shall be included in the last class.'

'We will settle that in any case introduced by me—'

'O, I shall be quite ready to go under your protection. You tell me you have other guests.'

'Yes, a great many. Amongst our numerous servants we have some prisoners who have to work for us and others who amuse us. Now I think of it I'll introduce you as a musician.'

'Agreed?' I cried, laughing. 'I am ready for the adventure.'

We went on talking about different things for some time, the ant proving herself very well informed and of a bright happy disposition. Once, however, she seemed rather ill at ease, and I inquired the reason.

'There are dragon-flies about,' she said, 'and they are a class of ruffians not to be trifled with. Don't you think that I am a little too conspicuous on this leaf?'

'I will defend you if need arise.'

'Thanks. Still I think I'll just make an opening for myself in the middle of this fold which will give me a certain refuge in case of danger.'

I was quite of her opinion as to the advisability of this step. There were plenty of holes at the edge of the fold, but they were

none of them so readily accessible as the one the ant proposed making in the middle. We soon made an opening close to where we stood.

'There,' she said; 'I have now nothing to fear. At the slightest alarm I disappear.'

'You seem to stand greatly in awe of dragon-flies.'

'And well I may. If I fell into the clutches of one of them he would make but a single mouthful of me.'

'There are a good many down there near the banks of the pond.'

'Yes; and of every species.'

We watched their graceful and rapid movements for some little time. Presently the ant said to me,

'The wind is rising. Don't you think we had better get back to land?'

'Certainly I do; we can't remain here indefinitely. But I see no means of transport.'

'You need not look about you. We shall go on this leaf.'

'But it is attached to a plant.'

'Well, we will detach it.'

'Bravo?' I cried. 'Why did



not such a simple plan occur to me?

'Come, set to work. You are better provided with tools than I am. Cut, hew, and let us leave our moorings.'

Without further detail I attacked the stalk where it joined the leaf.

'Don't do it that way,' said the ant. 'Cut away the leaf beyond where it springs from the stem; you will find that much easier.'

I followed her advice, and we were soon quit of the moorings, which kept us at anchor in the centre of the water, and floating

along in the direction of the wind.

Our voyage was accomplished without any remarkable incident. Two or three times we ran into patches of pond-weed or knot-grass, but we easily made our way through the plant leaves of these plants. The water had again become clear. Passing over a tuft of water-milfoil, I called the ant's attention to the elegance and delicacy of this aquatic plant. Crowds of insects of every variety were disporting themselves amongst its branches. I should much have liked to pause and

examine more at my ease a sight so new to me, but it was impossible. The wind drove us on, and we were rapidly approaching the shore.

The ant seemed thoughtful, and

looked attentively at the point where to all appearance we should make the land. I asked her what was the matter.

'We are all right as long as we are in deep water,' she said; 'but



the part of the pond to which the wind is driving us is bordered with bulrushes, and we shall inevitably come to a standstill at some distance from the land. If these bulrushes do not extend far, we can cut some of their stalks, so that they will fall in the direction of the bank, and use the

prostrate stems as a bridge; but if they do extend far, we must find some other means of getting to land. I think that is what we shall have to do; for yesterday's storm has swelled the waters of the pond, and the banks, which slope gently down on this side, are partially submerged.'

My companion's remarks appeared to me well founded; but she had not allowed for an obstacle of another kind which we encountered before we reached the bed of bulrushes.

The surface of the water, though free from all encumbrances in the centre, became as we advanced more and more closely covered with floating bodies of every variety. The rain of the previous day had swept into the pond an immense number of odds and ends, such as sticks, stubble, leaves, grains, &c., and with them were mingled many dead bodies of insects. All these objects, drifted along by the wind, had accumulated near the bank, for which we were ourselves making. They soon formed a compact layer, which arrested our progress, and our vessel came to a standstill at a little distance from the bulrushes.

'What shall we do?' I exclaimed.

'If I were alone,' answered the ant, 'I could easily cross the obstruction; but you are heavier than I am, and if you ventured upon them you would certainly fall through.'

'I expect I should. But,' I added, 'you have friends who are looking out for you, who are perhaps uneasy at your long absence. For me, however, there is no hurry, and I will wait on this raft till the water falls. I shall escape in the end.'

'No, no,' she replied; 'I am not going to desert you in that style. We'll find some means of crossing together, or we will both remain here. I have promised to bring you safely to land, and I never break my word. Excuse me one moment: I am just going as far as the bulrushes to make a reconnaissance.'

As she spoke she ran to the

edge of the raft, and from it sprang on to the floating sticks near it.

'Mind the dragon-flies!' I shouted after her.

'Make yourself easy,' she replied; 'I'll take care of myself.'

I watched her as she made her way across, carefully selecting the firmest-looking objects to step upon. More than once I lost sight of her, and feared that she had fallen through some unnoticed crevice; but she reappeared immediately, and in a few minutes I saw her arrive safe and sound at the foot of a tall bulrush, which stood alone a little in advance of the rest. She set to work to climb, and I trembled lest she should be perceived by some dragon-fly, but fortunately there were none in sight just then.

Once at the top she paused, and looked about her long and earnestly. She made me some signs of which I could not understand the meaning, and then came down as she had gone up. When she was again on the level of the water she disappeared behind the bulrush.

I waited, expecting her to return and tell me the result of her observations, but it was some minutes before she reappeared. What could have become of her? I wondered. I was sure that she had not been carried off by a dragon-fly, or any other creature of prey, for, as I was not far from the bulrush, I must have witnessed the tragedy. Could she have caught sight of some enemy, and have kept still with a view to eluding its notice?

I was reflecting thus when I noticed that the bulrush, from which I had not removed my eyes, was shaking slightly; then it bent towards me, and finally fell forwards. I had only just time to spring aside out of its way,

for it struck the lily-leaf where I had been standing, and the brown spikelets forming its head lashed up the water behind me, drenching me with spray.

I now, as I thought, fully understood the ant's intentions. By gnawing through the stem of the plant with her sharp jaws on the side furthest from me, she had made it fall with a view to throwing a bridge between my raft and the place which she had reached. The only difficulty had been to make the bulrush fall in the right direction, and the result proved that she had taken the proper steps.

She was already running rapidly towards me on her extempore bridge, crying triumphantly,

'Well, what do you think of my skill! Did I calculate rightly?'

'Perfectly,' I replied, 'and I will try and avail myself of the road you have made. It will be rather difficult, for I am not much of a rope-dancer.'

'You are all wrong, friend,' she interrupted. 'I have no intention of letting you run such a risk as that; the bridge isn't wide enough for you, and besides it leads nowhere. I didn't mean it for a bridge at all, but as a kind of ear to help us to cross all this floating rubbish without leaving our raft. We must begin by launching the folded part of the leaf on the water. There, that is done; now come this side, and take the stem of the bulrush between your forefeet. Splendid! Now push against the lily-leaf with your hind feet with all your strength. It is moving. Go on. Stand firm! Courage—we are getting on first-rate.'

So we were—we were moving.

I obeyed all the ant's instructions as she gave them. Firmly grasping the bulrush between my forefeet, I gave an impetus to the

lily-leaf with my hinder limbs, thus compelling it to slide under me, and so breaking the resistance of the floating rubbish. Every now and then I left off propelling the raft to move a little forwards, and thus without over-exertion I got our bark safely as far as the root of the broken bulrush.

Arrived there, I inquired of the ant what was to be done next.

'Well, there's one great difficulty conquered,' she observed, 'but we are not out of the wood yet. We are nearly past the floating sticks, for you see the bulrushes have stopped their further progress, and the water in front of us is quite clear; but I am puzzled to know what to do next.'

I looked in the direction of the bulrushes, close to which we now were, and noticed that as the ant had said there was no rubbish between them. Their tall smooth stems rose, at some little distance from each other, from clear and transparent water, and as they only formed a narrow belt the shore we wished to gain was distinctly visible beyond them. For all that, however, the little forest between us and that shore formed an impassable barrier to our raft. We should undoubtedly have to abandon it for some other means of transport.

'The water will soon fall,' observed the ant; 'but I think the pond is too deep here for us to be left high and dry even then. Bulrushes always grow with their roots in water. It's no use waiting for what won't help us a bit when it happens. Let's think of something else.'

'We could, it is true,' she went on, 'cut another bulrush and make it fall towards the bank, but it would not be long enough quite to reach it, and when one got to the end, even supposing—which is

doubtful—that you could cross such a narrow bridge, we should still have water before us.’

‘O, we could swim then,’ I observed. ‘We should only have a little distance to go.’

‘You think so, do you, cricket? Don’t fancy anything so ridiculous. The little distance, as you call it, will be the most dangerous part of our journey. Don’t you know that the banks of ponds are peopled—not to speak of frogs and water-beetles—with the larvæ of stone flies, willow flies, and dragon-flies, all equally ferocious? Have you ever seen the larvæ of dragon-flies?’

‘No, never.’

‘Well, then, beware of making their acquaintance.’

‘Are they, then, so very cruel?’

‘You had a tussle with a dytiscus larva last night, didn’t you?’

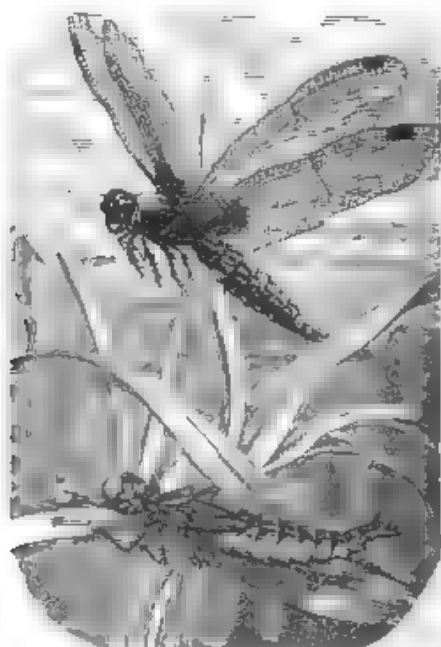
‘I did indeed, and won no easy victory.’

‘Well, the larvæ of dragon-flies are much more formidable.’

‘Are they really? And do they live in the water too?’

‘O, we shall see plenty before we land, you may make sure of that. Only let us take care not to fall into their clutches.’

‘All right. But what’s to be done next?’



(To be continued.)

THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MONSTERS OF THE DEEP.

THE ant reflected a little, and then observed,

'There is one way of escape—not an easy one, it is true; but you are very strong, and between us I think we shall succeed in surmounting all difficulties. This is what I propose doing: our raft is too large to pass between the bulrushes, we must cut it down a little.'

'Do you really mean it?'

'Of course I do.'

'And how do you mean to act about it?'

'You must follow my instructions.'

'I am ready. Proceed.'

'Then first cut that stalk there, and then there.'

As she spoke she pointed to the bulrush she had thrown down, and which now lay across our leaf, indicating the exact points at which the divisions were to be made.

I set to work. The first operation did not take long. It was only the outside of the stalk which was hard, as the inside consisted merely of a soft pith which offered very little resistance. I had soon cut off a piece of the length of the lily leaf.

'Now,' said the ant, 'draw towards you the part of the bulrush which is still floating, and cut off a second piece of the same length as the first.'

I did as I was bid.

The two pieces of bulrush now lay on our leaf. The ant made me place them alongside of each other.

'So far, so good,' she said. 'Now

go and take hold of the leaf by the edge, draw it towards you as you did yesterday evening when you wanted shelter, and fold it over the two stalks. You will then cut off all which projects beyond them.'

I began to see what she was aiming at, and after a good deal of pretty hard work I succeeded in folding one piece of the leaf over what was to form the framework of our raft. I then, as ordered, cut off all which projected beyond it and threw it into the water.

'Very good. Now do the same on the other side.'

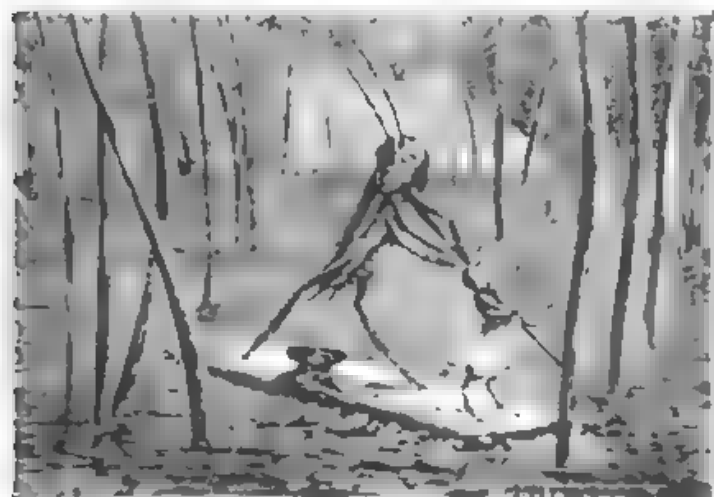
I was already at work again, but this second task was more difficult of accomplishment than the first had been, because I could not now go on to the other side of the stalks, and it was necessary to cut off the surplus part of the leaf before folding the remainder over the bulrush. I succeeded at last after an hour of intense exertion, and we found ourselves in possession of a long narrow raft as stable as we could wish and perfectly competent to carry us.

We had now to get it to the outer boundary of the belt of bulrushes, and to do so it was still necessary to cross a short space covered with floating rubbish. This, however, presented no serious difficulty. The ant again ventured on to the loose sticks, and picking out a bit of stubble which bent over the raft, she made an incision in its stalk which sent it toppling down. I put it to the same use as I had the bulrush, and soon

one end of our bark was between the stalks of the aquatic plants, beyond which we hoped to dash our bark.

Very extraordinary and altogether new to me was the appearance of the kind of forest into which we were now entering. The smooth dark-green stalks of the bulrushes, which were as thick as my body, rose abruptly

from the water and attained a considerable height. They were sufficiently wide apart for our raft, now so much reduced in size, to pass between them. As already stated, the water about their roots was clear and almost entirely free from the covering of rubbish that we had left behind us, so that very little force was needed to get our boat along. Now and then the



head of the raft came into collision with a bulrush; but the efforts, feeble as they were, of the ant, who stood in the bow, sufficed to turn us aside from any such temporary obstacle and get us back into the right channel. We were soon floating in more open waters.

Presently, on the leaf of a water-plantain, which we were approaching, I noticed something which puzzled me greatly. It looked like a huge creature clinging to the leaf, though it was evidently only the remains of some such creature. It was a dry skin of a whitish colour, with a long slit down the back.

'That,' said the ant, when I pointed it out to her, 'is the skin of a dragon-fly's larva. As I have

told you, the larvae of dragon-flies frequent the banks of ponds, so we are pretty sure to see some soon. When a larva has attained its full size it leaves the water by climbing up some aquatic plant, and then, clinging to a leaf or stem with its feet, it remains motionless awaiting its metamorphosis. Very soon its skin dries and splits down the back to admit of the exit of the perfect dragon-fly, which gradually unfolds its feeble crumpled wings and finally flies away, leaving its empty husk in the position of the one you see.'

'What a very strange history !

'O, I have long been familiar with these curious remains. One day, when I was busily employed

with some of my companions in carrying a stick, we saw one of our own people in the distance dragging along a fantastic looking monster some twenty or thirty times as big as herself. You can imagine our astonishment. We hastened to her assistance, and when we got close to her we discovered that what we had taken for an animal was nothing but the dry and of course quite light skin of a dragon-fly's larva, which had been carried by the wind from the banks of the water and dropped close to our home. I need scarcely add that we returned to our work at once, as there was really no need for any one to help our sister to drag her burden to its destination.

Whilst she was talking the ant neglected to guide our raft, and the consequence was that we became entangled amongst the erect stems of a cluster of bladderwort, the gracefully yellow flowers of which, supported on long footstalks, rose above the surface of the water, whilst their stalks and leaves floated beneath it by the help of a vast number of minute bladders filled with air. I ran to the bow of the boat, and by repeated blows with my oar I easily succeeded in getting it free from among the floating plants.

Whilst bending forwards when thus employed I noticed at a little distance from the bottom of the water what looked like a huge stationary air-bubble, which, for some reason unexplained, could not rise to the surface.

I called the ant, and pointing to the object, asked her if it were not a precious stone. She looked at it for some time without speaking, and then begged me to touch it with the end of the piece of stubble. I did so, and immediately a number of little globules of air rose from the seeming stone,

and burst as they reached the surface of the water.

'Ha, ha' cried the ant; 'I know what it is—it's a spider's house.'

'A spider's?' I exclaimed. 'Impossible.'

'It is, though—the web of a spider of the *argyroneta* species. I have never seen one, but I have heard of them.'

'I thought all spiders lived on land and breathed air, as we do.'

'This one is an exception, at least so far as the medium in which she lives is concerned. She breathes as we do, and lives in air, though under water.'

'Explain yourself.'

'This is how she goes to work: she spins silk as other spiders do, and when she wants to make her water-web she begins by throwing a few threads from branch to branch of some submerged plant. She then unites these first threads with a vast number of others, so arranging them as to form a kind of bell flower turned upside down. You know what bell flowers are, cricket?'

'O, yes; they are pretty blue flowers, common in meadows. I have often seen them.'

'Well, the *argyroneta* makes a silken bell-flower of a close and mysterious texture. I need scarcely add that whilst she is thus employed she holds her breath, which she seems to be able to do for a considerable time without inconvenience. Her little structure completed, she goes up to fetch an air-bubble, which she brings down and places in her bell-flower. She repeats this operation again and again till her dome is completely filled. She then installs herself in it, and now you know how she manages to live on and in the air stored up by herself.'

'I knew before that spiders are

clever,' I observed; 'but I had no idea they were so skilful as all that. And why does the argyro-beta take all this trouble to make her web in the water instead of living as other spiders do?'

'O, it's just a matter of taste. Perhaps she prefers water larvae to any other diet.'

'Doesn't she get wet in her trips from her web to the surface of the water?'



'No; her body is completely covered with a close down, through which the water cannot penetrate to her skin.'

During this conversation our bark continued its course to the bank.

The part of the pond we were now crossing was peopled by nu-

merous inhabitants. Great numbers of gymini or whirligig beetles gambolled about, swimming very rapidly, and describing as they did so some hundreds of interlocked circles. At our approach they sped away, to form into a fresh group a little distance off. Hydro-metres or water-measurers skimmed

the surface of the water as rapidly as if it were frozen hard, and it amused me to watch their jerking progress, vying in swiftness with the conixæ and notonectæ, which, turned over on their backs, darted along with equal speed.

I did not know all these insects or their habits, never having frequented the banks of ponds; but the ant named them all as they passed us.

'They are all ruffians,' she said, 'who live by prey. Look beneath us now.'

The water gradually decreased in depth as we advanced, and the muddy bottom of the pond could be distinctly seen.

It too was alive with a whole world of swimming and crawling creatures. The ant pointed out to me the larvæ of a dragon-fly, which was bearing down upon a smaller larvæ, probably with the intention of devouring it. When it was within reach of its victim it suddenly darted out a kind of jointed arm provided with strong pincers, which, when at rest, it keeps folded over the lower part of its head. With this arm it firmly clutched its prey. I was able to examine its proceedings at my leisure, and I was much struck with the rapidity with which it used this arm, which flashed out as if let loose by a trigger. The dragon-fly larvæ was certainly armed with a very formidable weapon, and I saw that the ant had been guilty of no exaggeration in what she had told me.

At the bottom we could see neptæ or water-scorpions amongst a number of small brownish looking objects which I at first took for bits of stick, but which I guessed on closer examination to be something quite different. I pointed them out to the ant.

'They are not sticks,' she said,

'but the larvæ of phryganeæ or caddis-flies, which live, as you may perceive, in very bad company, and would soon be devoured if they did not take the precaution of forming for themselves a kind of case which completely covers them. They only permit their heads and the leg-bearing segments of their bodies to be seen, and they draw them in on the slightest alarm. They are sensible creatures, I can tell you.'

'What do they live on?'

'A little of everything.'

'Do they spend their whole lives in the water?'

'O dear, no. When they have attained their full size—that is to say, when they find they have left off growing—they fasten their case to some plant, and pass through much such a metamorphosis as dragon-fly larvæ. Look, there is one living.'

'What is that monster? I asked, at the sudden apparition close to our raft of an enormous black worm with a wrinkled skin, and a head which, instead of being convex at the top as all ours are, was concave, a peculiarity giving him a very strange and ugly appearance.

'It is the larvæ of a hydrous or black water beetle. There, look at it seizing that inoffensive mollusc and crushing it between its jaws.'

'Yes, yes; but it is going to be attacked in its turn. I see a huge dytiscus larvæ stealthily approaching with some sinister design. It is opening its mandibles and about to strike. Ah!'

This exclamation burst from me in my surprise, when just as I expected to witness a struggle between the dytiscus larvæ and that of the hydrous, the latter suddenly disappeared in a kind of black cloud, which completely covered him.

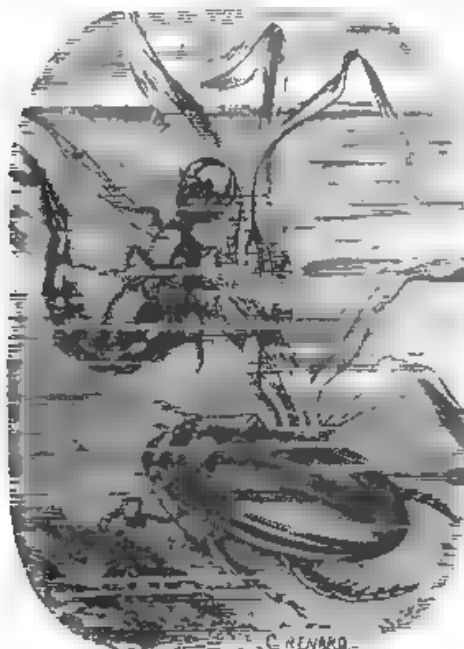
'Well fouled!' cried the ant laughing. 'Did you ever see a more original style of evading your enemies? What the hydrons emitted does not seem to have been to the taste of the dytiscus, for he is decamping in double-quick time.'

'Does this queer fellow—I mean the hydrons—ever get any wings?'

'Of course he does, only he does

not spread them out as caddis-flies and dragon-flies do, but keeps them folded beneath his elytra or wing-cases; for he is of the coleoptera family. He does not have to change his place of residence either; for he continues to live chiefly in the water like the dytiscus, which he resembles, though he is larger and more peaceably inclined.'

'Do you mean to say that in



his perfect state he no longer lives by prey?

'Yes, I do; he browses quietly on vegetables.'

'And the dytiscus?'

'O, he always retains his fierce nature.'

'These changes in character are very surprising.'

'Shall I tell you something which will surprise you still more?'

I looked inquiringly at the speaker.

'You see that worm crawling at the bottom of the water?'

'Yes; what of it?'

'Presently it too will have wings, but when it has it will never eat again.'

'Why not?'

'Because it will no longer have a mouth.'

'You are making fun of me!'

'I am doing no such thing.'

'He can't live long like that.'

'A single day. He is called the ephemera, or May-fly. His larva, however, lives much longer—two years at least.'

'If I were an ephemera larva

I should be in no hurry for my metamorphosis.'

'O, there are always compensations.'

At this juncture our raft was suddenly struck by a huge beetle, which was rapidly cleaving the water, using as paddles his two hind legs, which were of great length and fringed with hairs.

'Clumsy fellow!' cried the ant, who had been flung down by the shock.

'What ever was it?'

'A dytiscus, bother—a ruffian of the worst class; quite capable of running against us on purpose, in the hope of making us fall into the water.'

'Well, he has made off now, at all events.'

We now remained silent for some minutes, whilst I looked down upon the restless eager world beneath us, of which I had known nothing until my companion revealed to me its wonders.

'One thing surprises me, ant,' I observed presently.

'And what might that be?'

'That you are so intimately ac-

quainted with all these creatures. One would think you had lived amongst them.'

'The reason is not far to seek. In the summer we wander about, keep our eyes open, and hear all sorts of things. Then when the winter comes we talk, which is as good a way as any of passing the time.'

'A way combining instruction with amusement.'

'And you—what do you do in the dull season?'

'O,' I replied, feeling a little embarrassed, 'I sleep.'

'More pleasant than instructive, I should think. No offence, but that accounts for your being stronger in body than in mind. However,' she added, laughing, 'thanks to our meeting, we have both got well out of an awkward scrape. I have thought for you, and you have worked for me. But here we are.'

She was right. Our raft, once free of the bladderwort, drifted easily before the wind, and now came to a standstill amongst the grass on the banks of the pond.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOME SENSIBLE ADVICE.

'Catch hold of my tail,' I said to the ant, 'and I will help you to disembark.'

She did as I suggested, and taking a spring, I gained the land at a single bound.

The spot at which we alighted was not far from the main road, and to reach it we had to climb a grassy bank. The grass had been recently mown, but, short as it was, it presented quite a formidable obstacle to the progress of the ant.

I therefore told her to seat herself on my back, and hold on firmly. This she readily consented

to do; and one carrying the other we soon, and without any incident worthy of note, reached the wide path down which we had both been swept by the water the day before.

It was just here that I had taken refuge amongst the strawberry-plants when I had been frightened off the road by the noise of an approaching carriage. I took it into my head that I should like to see the place where I had been received by the mole cricket, and had had my pleasant little chat with the grasshopper.

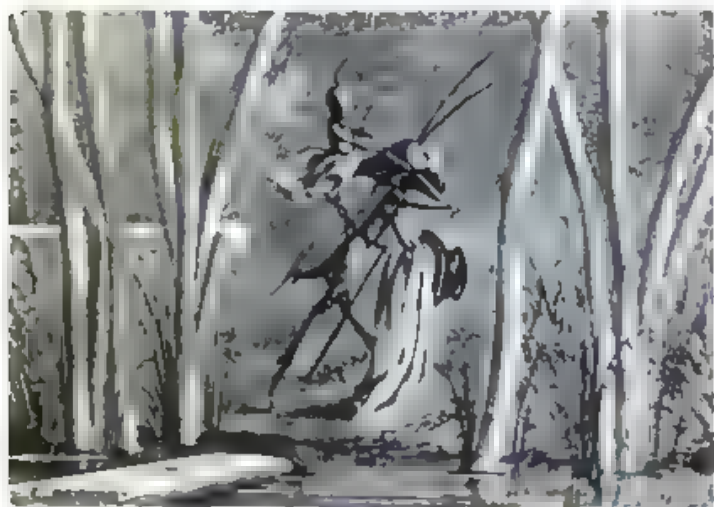
I mentioned my wish to the ant, and she said she would go with me. As we crossed the road, I also acquainted her with all the incidents of the first evening of my wandering life, dwelling specially on my meeting with the mole cricket.

I was soon beneath the strawberry-plant which had protected the entrance to my cousin's home.

Had that entrance been destroyed in the storm? No; a moment's search, and I had the pleasure of finding it still intact.

'Wait for me here,' I said to the ant; 'I will just run in and ask my cousin how she is—at least, if I find her at home, which is doubtful.'

'I'll come with you, cricket; I shall be very glad to make the



acquaintance of your worthy relative.'

We entered the passage. All went well at first, but it soon became so dark that I had to grope my way.

I knew that the passage led straight into the room in which the mole cricket was generally to be found, and into that room alone. There was therefore no fear of our losing our way in the dark subterranean passage. I stopped, however, for a sudden fear crossed my mind. It will be remembered that I had rushed out of the room for which I was now making when the mole cricket raised the alarm of the mole's approach, and that in my hurry I had not stopped to ascertain whe-

ther that alarm had been true or false. Perhaps my cousin, compelled as she was to be always on the alert against an ever-present danger, fancied she saw moles everywhere, and had cried out in her sleep. If, on the other hand, the mole had really broken into her house, everything would most certainly have been turned upside down by his visit; and in thus venturing myself in the darkness, I ran a risk of tumbling into some hole, from which it might be very difficult to escape. These reflections brought me to a standstill, and I began to shout at the top of my voice; but there was no answer; the most profound silence reigned on every side.

'Come,' said the ant, 'the place

is completely deserted, your cousin is elsewhere, or she has been eaten up. Anyhow, there is nothing for us to do here.'

'Wait a minute,' I replied; 'I think I make out something.'

'If you do, you are sharper than I am, for I can't see the tips of my own antennæ.'

'I see a glimmer of light.'

'O, you've struck your eye against a stone,' was the laughing rejoinder.

'No such thing; look yourself down there at the bottom of the passage.'

'Ah, perhaps you are right, after all.'

'What can it be?'

'Probably only a glowworm. What else do you suppose it could be?'

'Suppose it were she?'

'She?'

'I mean, if it were him?'

'And who might "him" be?'

'My old companion. You know whom I mean—the glowworm I was telling you about just now.'

'Very possibly. Are you much set on seeing him again?'

'Of course I am. He may be able to give me news of my cousin. He was her friend.'

'Well, well go and find him, but we must make haste, for we are losing a great deal of time.'

We went on, carefully feeling the ground before us.

'Don't go any further,' said the ant presently; 'call him.'

I shouted, 'Firefly!'

No answer. I shouted again, 'Firefly, Firefly!'

Still complete silence, and the light suddenly disappeared.

'Come along, come along,' cried the ant impatiently, 'you see it is not he.'

'I am afraid not,' I replied, 'for he would certainly have recognised my voice and turned to me. Let us go.'

The ant turned round, and as I could not, I walked backwards till we again emerged in the open air.

'I should like once more to see the terrace,' I observed, 'where I spent such a happy time. It is not far from here. There was a grasshopper—'

'Do you suppose she is still there?'

'O, no!'

'Well, what then?'

'O, I only want to see the place again.'

'Are you sentimental, then? But come now, we shall never have done if you mean to visit all your friends and all the places where you had pleasant times in their company. I don't know how you feel, but I am famished. Are not you hungry?'

'Well, I own my appetite is becoming rather sharp.'

We did not have to look far for a dinner, as there was plenty to eat within reach. The ant made her meal off the skin of a larva, which she found under a strawberry-bush, and I contented myself with a few tender shoots of grass.

'Now, cricket, we must be off again. You still mean to go with me?'

'Of course,' I replied.

We had the choice of two roads. We could either reach our destination, the wood, by climbing up the strawberry-bush in a straight line, or we could follow the avenue for a short distance and then take the hollow path.

The ant voted for the latter, although it was rather further.

'My chief reason,' she explained, 'is that I know this way well, having gone by it some hundred times, whereas the other is quite new to me.'

'We might make a compromise,' I suggested. 'Suppose we go up

the strawberry-bed as far as the edge of the wood, and follow the latter till we come to the hollow path. I know the neighbourhood well, and if you adopt my plan we shall cut off a good piece of the way, besides, there will be less risk of unpleasant encounters.'

The ant made no objections to my proposal, and we started for the wild paddock, which formed the upper boundary of the strawberry-bed.

I had a reason, which I did not think it necessary to mention, for preferring this way. I wanted to pass the place where I had left my companions of the day before, so as to find out whether they had or had not fallen victims to the storm.

No incident worthy of note occurred as we crossed the strawberry-bed. The ground was pretty level, and but for the detours we were obliged to make round the clusters of plants, we were able to accomplish the ascent in an almost straight line.

I had made my calculations pretty accurately, for on reaching the paddock I recognised a little distance off the rabbit-burrow through which I and my companions had regained the light of day after our subterranean journey.

As we went up I told the ant of that extraordinary adventure, observing that I had made the trip we were now taking above ground in the bowels of the earth.

'Look!' I said, pointing to the gaping entrance of the burrow; 'that is where we came out. Let us go in for a minute to rest and take breath. Don't you find it very hot?'

We entered the subterranean passage, and found it beautifully cool. Worn out with fatigue, we were soon both sound asleep.

I was the first to wake, and leaving the ant to her repose, I went to take a turn outside.

It was now about four o'clock, and although it was not quite so warm as it had been the day before, the sun was still very hot.

I easily found the stone beneath which I had rested near the opening of the burrow, but there was not the slightest trace of the hole I had dug beneath it to rescue the unfortunate *staphylinus*. The rain had again levelled the ground all round, and I wondered if the poor beetle had been blocked in again.

'If you are in a trap again,' I said to myself, 'there you may stay, for all I care.'

On approaching the gooseberry-bush, where the spider had taken up her abode the previous evening, I was agreeably surprised to find her motionless in the centre of her web. Two or three captive flies showed that to-day her labours had not been in vain. She was doubtless taking her afternoon siesta. I called to her, and she recognised me, and came down at once.

'Is it you, cricket?' she cried. 'I am very glad to see you safe and sound; I thought you were lost.'

'I have had a very narrow escape, dear friend,' I replied. 'But here I am; and you?'

'O, I have been in no danger, the rain tore my web, that's all. During the storm I took shelter under the branches of this gooseberry-bush. But you said you had a narrow escape; tell me about it.'

'I was rolled by a torrent into the pond you see down there, but I got out all right. Have you seen the mole cricket and the glowworm again?'

'I can give you no news of the mole cricket, but I saw Firefly

go into the burrow again yesterday evening.'

'With his lamp still alight ?'

'O, yes, of course.'

'Foolish fellow ! And how do you fare ? You get plenty of game here, don't you ?'

'Yes ; I've found a very good situation, and I shall stay in it. So will you, I suppose ?'

'Well, I won't say what I may do finally ; but just now I am merely passing by.'

'Where are you going, then ?'

'To visit an ant-hill somewhere about here in the wood.'

'To visit an ant-hill ! You are going into an ant-hill ! What on earth do you want there ?'

'O, to gratify a whim I have taken into my head.'

'Are you out of your mind, cricket ! It will be simple suicide ! Do you wish to be murdered ?'

'O, I'm not going alone. You must know that I made acquaintance with an ant last night ; in fact, I may almost say that I saved her life. We are now the best friends in the world. She has invited me to her home, and I have accepted.'

'You are going to commit a very great imprudence.'

'Perhaps I did agree rather hastily ; but it is just the spice of adventure about it which attracts me.'

'You had better be warned in time. Ants are an infamous race of creatures.'

'Hot-tempered, but not bad at heart. I don't think the one who invited me is capable of enticing me into a trap.'

'Perhaps your friend is not, but the others ? Take my advice, and don't go.'

'I have reason to believe that my friend is no common ant. She vouches for my safety. I think she must be a ruler of some kind.'

'Why, they have no rulers.'

'You don't say so ?'

'Yes, and I repeat it, they have no rulers.'

'Are you sure ?'

'Perfectly sure. They form a republic, in which all are equal.'

'Well, I have promised ; it is too late to draw back. I will run the risk.'

'I'd rather you than me. But anyhow, be careful be very careful. Beware of treading on their corns. Admire all you see ; criticise nothing, and leave as soon as ever you can.'

'Don't be afraid ; I am no reckless fool. And, by the way, she is here.'

'Who ?'

'My friend—the one who invited me. Wouldn't you like to make her acquaintance ?'

'Can't say I'm very anxious, but still, if it pleases you. Besides, I shan't be sorry to see for myself if your confidence is well founded.'

We found the ant awake, and busy over her toilet. When she caught sight of me with the spider, she gave the latter what seemed to me rather a defiant look. I introduced them to each other, and they bowed coldly, showing by their distant manner that neither had much confidence in the other.

The spider was the first to speak, and she addressed the ant in the following terms.

'My friend informs me, madam, that you have invited him to spend a few days with you. I will not disguise that this surprises me extremely. I thought that strangers were rigorously excluded from your settlements.'

'* * You are wrong, madam. I don't deny that it would be far from prudent for a stranger to intrude upon us without some sort of introduction ; but we cor-

dally welcome those who come in a friendly way, especially if accompanied by one of our own people.'

'You think, then, that you can guarantee the safety of my friend?'

'Certainly I do.'

'I should not care much about going myself.'

'And perhaps you would be right. We know how to distinguish between different people.'



'And what might that mean, pray?'

'That we don't receive everybody in the same style.'

'If I understand you rightly, I should not meet with a very cordial welcome.'

'Perhaps not,' replied the ant dryly.

'May I ask why?'

The ant shrugged her shoulders, as much as to say she had no reason to give.

'Come, tell me; is it because you don't like me?'

'To be frank, madam, none of you spiders are favourites with us.'

'And what is the reason of this general dislike of us?'

'I am afraid of hurting your feelings.'

'O, never mind about that. If the reason seems ill-founded I can explain it away.'

'You will have it, then? Well, to begin with, you are said to make bad wives.'

'I suppose that accusation comes from our husbands.'

'I have been told that you sometimes ill-treat those husbands to such an extent that death is the result.'

'O, there are quarrels in every household; and as we are the stronger—'

'You are also accused of a certain fierceness of character.'

'Come now, that's really an unjust reproach, especially from you. You ants are no models of meekness.'

'We are neither fierce nor cruel. We only defend ourselves when we are attacked.'

'Then think of your avarice!'

'Only another name for our foresight.'

'And your egotism. You think the whole world is made for you.'

'We mind our own business, and leave others to do the same. Every one for himself in this world.'

'Come, come,' I broke in, thinking this discussion was becoming too bitter, 'enough of this. We all have our faults and peculiarities, let's change the subject. Didn't you tell me, spider, that our friend Firefly was in this burrow?'

'Yes. Do you want to speak to him?'

'I should not be sorry to see him again.'

'I'll go and look for him,' said the spider, relieved, doubtless, to break off a colloquy so far from pleasant.

With that she left us, to disappear in the subterranean passage.

The ant looked after her for a few minutes, and then, with a toss of her head, observed,

'That's a creature with whom I never could make friends.'

'It strikes me your feeling on that point is entirely reciprocated.'

'She comes of a treacherous race. I wonder you should have taken up with such a hussy. Take my word for it, you'll be disappointed in her.'

'Nonsense; she has put you out, and you misjudge her in consequence. As for me, I owe her a great deal; for she proved herself a faithful and devoted friend under circumstances when she might well have deserted me.'

'O, she had some interested motive.'

'I don't think she had.'

'Never mind whether she had or not; only beware of her. I repeat, beware of her.'

A few minutes afterwards the spider reappeared, and informed me that she had been as far as she could, but that she had called Firefly in vain, for no answer could she obtain. Either the glow-worm was asleep, or he had penetrated further into the burrow than she could follow.

'He heard you fast enough,' growled the ant, 'but he took care not to answer, he knows you.' Then, in a louder voice, she added, 'Come, cricket, let us be off. We must get home before night, or we shall find the doors closed upon us.'

With that she left the burrow, but the spider detained me a moment to say,

'Take my advice, and don't go. Don't trust those ants, you will never come back alive. Believe me, your trustful nature is being imposed upon.'

'I have promised,' I replied, 'and I never go from my word.'

Why, to draw back now would look as if I were afraid. If the worst come to the worst, I can defend myself.'

'You can defend yourself! What a delusion! You will be cut to pieces in less time than I can say it.'

'I shall not be eaten without first doing a good deal of execution with my jaws and claws.'

'What can you do against hundreds of ants?'

'Anyhow, the first to attack me will pay dearly for his temerity. But *au revoir*, dear friend; I must go.'

'Farewell, cricket.'

With these words I left her, and turning round a little to wave yet another farewell, I saw she was already back in the middle of her web.

She gazed after me, shaking her head.



(To be continued.)

THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NIGHT AIR ALWAYS AFFECTS MY NERVES.

I REJOINED the ant, who was striding rapidly along on the edge of the wood. We walked side by side in silence for some little distance. I was thinking of what the spider had said. Could it be that, as she had said, advantage was being taken of my good faith? She had evidently more shrewdness, penetration, and knowledge of the world than I, but, on the other hand, she had made no secret of her prejudice against ants, and it is well known that prejudices make us unfair, because they pervert the judgment.

We were now skirting along the wild paddock to which I have already alluded, and we were soon once more in the hollow path which had caused the catastrophe of the previous day.

'Take care,' I said to the ant; 'there are some ant-lions' ambushes here into which you might fall.'

'O, I know them,' she rejoined. 'You go on first, and I'll look after myself.'

The descent of the bank was accomplished without accident. Arrived in the road we turned to the right, and a few minutes later we entered the wood. The sun was beginning to set.

'Bother the processionists!' suddenly exclaimed my companion. 'We shall have to wait ever such a time.'

I looked before me, and great was my surprise at seeing what it was which barred our progress. The road was completely blocked by row after row of caterpillars marching in single file, and so

close to each other that it was impossible to pass between them.

'Whatever are they?' I cried.

'O, the larvae of procession-moths. Every evening they leave their nest, which you can see down there on the trunk of that oak, and go to feed on other trees.'

'And why do they walk head to tail in that style?'

'O, probably because it happens to suit them.'

'How wonderful!'

'The same thing happens every evening. When the time for leaving their nests arrives one of them sets off, another follows, and this goes on until the kind of silken bag which serves them as a home during the day, and which they make themselves, is quite empty. They don't all walk in single file, for some prefer to go two or three abreast. When the first halts, all do the same. When the first starts again, the whole column is set in motion.'

'And you think a good many will pass in that manner now?'

'Seven or eight hundred, the whole colony, in fact.'

'Extraordinary!'

'I have often met them, and very tiresome they are, for they take a long time to file past. The idea of making war on them and making them evacuate this wood has been mooted in our councils, but it would be no light undertaking to do so.'

'Could they defend themselves against you?'

'I don't think they could; but they would have some formidable champions. Do you see that

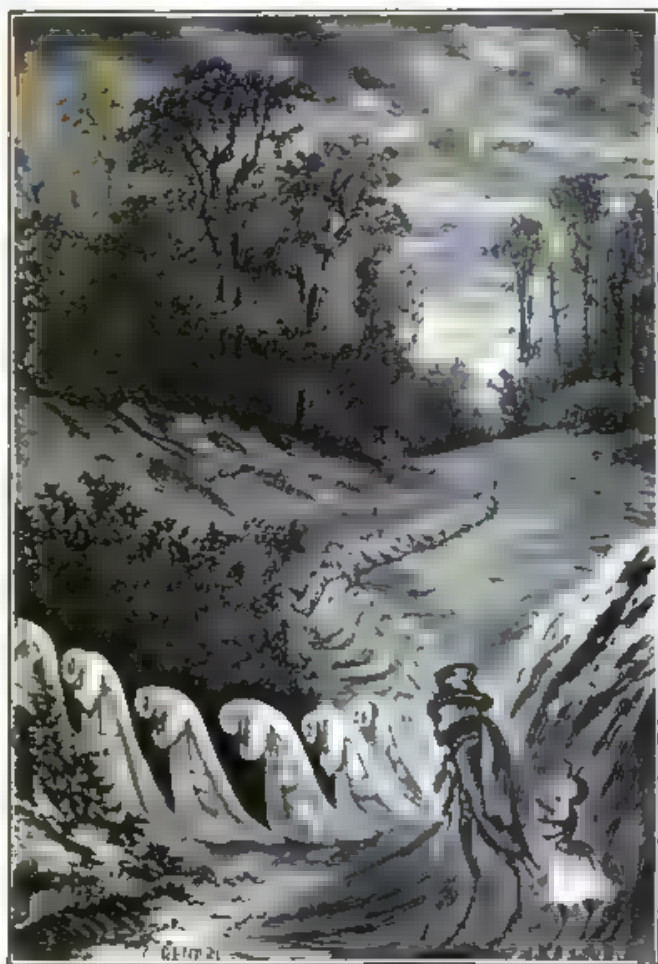
splendid green beetle climbing up the trunk of that tree down there! It is a calceola. There are some thirty such in the neighbourhood, who would rigorously defend the caterpillars if we attacked them.'

'They are fond of them, then?'

'Yes, after a fashion of their own.'

'What do you mean?'

'That they feed on them, make their dinners off them, the best



of reasons for allowing no one else to meddle with them.'

The filing past of the caterpillars continued without interruption. They were rather large, and they bristled with long grayish hairs. I told the ant that though the procession offered an insurmountable obstacle to her, I could

cross it easily enough, and that she had but to climb on my back as she had already done before. My suggestion pleased her, and she acted upon it. I then cleared the caterpillars with one bound, and resumed our journey.

'Have we much farther to go?'

I inquired presently

'If we could follow this road we should certainly reach my home before night; but I think it would be prudent to leave it and go through the wood, for here we run a risk of unpleasant meetings. As soon as it begins to get dark this path is frequented by numerous nocturnal prowlers, whom it is as well to avoid. I mean such creatures as hedgehogs, shrews, and snakes, not to speak of hares and rabbits, who might trample us under their feet. Come this way; we shall soon find one of our own paths.'

We entered the thicket. This was the first time I had ever been in a wood, and I was deeply impressed by the novelty of the scene. The growing darkness contributed not a little to produce in me that mental condition which is not exactly fear, yet resembles fear. There is certainly something solemn about a wood, especially in the evening. It seems as if evil passions must reign in its dark shadows, and as if its inhabitants must necessarily be more ferocious than those of smiling sunlit fields and meadows.

I was deeply moved. I tried to reason with myself, and to persuade myself that my excitement was the result of too vivid an imagination; but it is of no use to reason against impressions: one just receives them impassively. Now and then I glanced at the ant, who trotted silently along beside me. What were my thoughts to her? It seemed to me that her face was assuming a diabolical expression, much aggravated by the loss of one of her antennæ. Why had she not two like the rest of the world? Her squinting eyes, too, now seemed to have in them a crafty look I had never before noticed. How foolish I had been to trust myself with her! Instead of passing the night

peacefully at the bottom of a cosy little hole beneath some stone, here I was running about the woods in bad company. Yes, I realised it all now. I felt how justly I had been warned against my companion. And where was I going? To spend the night in an ants' nest! Yes, cricket, what on earth were you thinking of when you agreed to such an extraordinary proposal? Did any one ever before go to an ants' nest in this free-and-easy manner? You might have been carried off to one or enticed to one, but to go with your eyes open in this manner

But after all, I thought, there is still time to draw back. Why must I follow this ant? What if I were guilty of a breach of politeness to her by suddenly turning tail and making for the path in double-quick time? But where was the path now? Was it on the right hand or the left? I did not know. I had lost my way, and that being the case I was just as likely as not to walk straight into the colony of ants, where, coming alone and unprotected, murder, inevitable murder, would await me. Bah! the very thought made me shudder.

'What is that?' I exclaimed, trembling with fright, as I stared at a strange-looking object apparently crouching at the foot of a tree.

'It is a boletus,' replied the ant, 'a large mushroom. Really,' she added, laughing, 'one would imagine you were afraid of it.'

'Afraid! of course I am not afraid; but it is always well to distrust the unfamiliar. I thought it was some animal lying there.'

'Well, here we are in one of our paths; we can walk more comfortably now.'

'Hush! I hear voices behind me,' I exclaimed, as I stopped. 'Voices whispering, several voices.'

'They are those of ants on their way home; let us wait for them.'

'Yes, let us wait for them,' I muttered aside. 'It is all over now; the die is cast, there is no drawing back. If I have made a fool of myself I must abide the consequences.'

Five or six ants now joined us.

'Why, it is Meg!' they cried, when they saw my companion (I already knew that her name

was Meg). 'We thought you were lost when you did not come back last night. But who is that? Where did you pick up that cricket?'

'A fine secret!' cried one.

'A handsome conquest!' echoed another.

'You are all out!' added a third; 'it's a steal she has taken into her service.'

'It was you, then, whom we saw seated on the creature's back?'



'Well done, Meg! we take care of ourselves in our old age!'

'Silence, you giddy young things!' cried Meg; 'this good cricket saved my life yesterday. It so happens that just now, through a chain of circumstances it would take too long to relate, he is cut off from his home and from his friends. I have invited him to spend a few days with us.'

Then Meg went on talking to them in a lower voice, and I watched them whispering and laughing together.

What Meg had said had reassured me a little, but only a little, for she might have said it merely to allay my suspicions. What were they all whispering about now?

We were following a very narrow path made by the ants, and there was only just room for me to pass along it. Presently it led between the stalks of ferns growing so closely together that I could hardly squeeze myself between them; then it passed through a kind of tunnel, under a fallen branch or over a stone, and it was

only by climbing them and creeping under that, at the cost of gigantic efforts, that I managed to accomplish the difficult transit.

It was now quite dark; and I told Meg I thought it would perhaps be better for me not to go into the ants' nest till the next morning, for how could I find my way about her home in the dark?

'Make your mind easy,' she replied; 'our colony is lit up.'

I looked upon this reply merely as a balmy joke, and thought to myself, 'They are not going to trouble their heads about me any more now; they know I can't escape them, and they no longer think it necessary even to give me a civil answer.'

All my old terror now revived. 'Here we are at last!' cried Meg.

We now entered a little glade with a very dry soil, on which grew nothing but short tufts of heather and scrubby grass, with here and there a little thicket of buckthorn, willow, and broom. The centre of this glade, which rose somewhat above the general level, was occupied by a couple of stunted beech trees, which from the close proximity of their trunks to each other near the roots you could tell to be but the shoots, already grown old, of some parent stock now removed.

At the base of these trunks I saw a huge dome-shaped tumulus or barrow, which in the light of the now rising moon stood out clearly against the green foliage of the bank beyond.

This was the mysterious colony of the ants.

The most profound silence reigned around; it might have been a city of the dead. Above it rose the gloomy forms of the beech-trees half stripped of their leaves. There was something altogether ominous in its appearance.

As we approached it Meg and her companions quickened their pace. I was walking in their midst, and as I was hurried along the words 'It is a prisoner she has taken' haunted me, and I found myself repeating them like the refrain of a song.

'A prisoner—a prisoner—prisoner!'

And then, 'Make your mind easy; our colony is lit up.'

There was certainly some hidden meaning in that last sentence—an ironical meaning probably—which I could not fathom.

We soon came to one of the entrances, which was then being barricaded for the night, according to the usual custom. Meg gave the password and we went in.

The first thing which struck me was the pungent and acrid smell which, as is well known, is characteristic of ants. I found myself in a room of moderate size, probably the guard-room, containing some fifty inmates. They did not seem to notice me, most likely because of the password given by my guide. I followed her along one of five or six passages leading from this room and then down several steps, getting ever nearer and nearer to the heart of the citadel.

It was exceedingly close and

I have already said that my olfactory nerves were greeted on entering the first room by a pungent smell. I subsequently found that this smell proceeded from an acid liquid secreted in their bodies by ants, and ejected at their enemies when they are provoked or attacked. The second thing to strike me was the fact that we could see our way quite clearly, though we were in a subterranean passage.

A dim bluish light pervaded the place.

It had, then, been no bad joke when Meg said to me, 'Make your mind easy; our colony is lit up.'

It was lit up; but how?—by what means? I asked my companion for an explanation.

'You will soon see all about it,' was the reply.

The light gradually increased as we went down.

Suddenly we came out in a

large room, with a low ceiling supported by a number of pillars of hardened earth, and with a whitish spongy floor, which emitted a bluish light of vividness sufficient for us to make out all the details characteristic of the extensive excavation at the entrance to which we had just arrived.

The ceiling and pillars of this curious subterranean chamber



were alike covered with innumerable ants, which appeared to be asleep, for not one of them stirred when we crossed the threshold.

'Well!' said Meg to me.

'I am struck dumb with surprise,' I murmured. 'I can't believe that these are ants. We have entered the very heart of your stronghold, and not a creature moves! Suppose I had made my way in with some sinister design!'

'O, you wouldn't have got as far as this. The alarm would have been given by the guards at the entrance, and you would have been put to death immediately, my comrades sleep peacefully here in full confidence in the vigilance of the sentinels at the doors.'

'Now please explain what seems to me the really extraordinary light which proceeds from the floor.'

'O, that's simple enough,' answered Meg: 'it comes from the whitish spongy fibres of a kind of mushroom,' which grows in old decayed wood. Our ants' nest is built on the stump of an old beech long since cut down. The warmth and humidity down here have been favourable to the growth of this phosphorescent fungus. Have you never noticed any of it before?'

'No, never.'

'That's because you don't go about in the woods of an evening. But now that your curiosity is

** Rhizomorpha subterranea.*

satisfied follow me, I am going to take you to one of our guests' chambers. You want rest, and so do I. 'To-morrow I will show you all over our colony.'

We entered another passage, and Meg led me to a very clean little room. When I had entered I helped her to replace some small

sticks which barricaded the entrance.

We wished each other good-night, and she retired.

My fears were all dispelled.

Meg's professions of friendship had been sincere. I felt perfectly safe in the ants' nest I had so much dreaded.

CHAPTER XVI

AMONGST THE ANTS.

TOWARDS the middle of the night I was suddenly woke by a loud noise which seemed to come from the large room, and a little later I heard footsteps passing backwards and forwards along the passage leading to my room.

Suddenly these footsteps seemed to pause at my door.

'Who is there?' I cried

No answer, but I heard whispering in the passage.

'Who is there?' I repeated; 'what do you want?'

'Who are *you*?' was the retort, in a far from friendly tone.

'O, don't you know? I am a friend, the cricket Meg brought in with her yesterday.'

'I know nothing about that, what are you doing there? Open the door, and be quick about it.'

At these words I became bathed in a cold sweat. In a moment I realised all the danger of my position. It was evident that the ants with whom I had to deal did not know of my arrival in their home. I had entered it at night. I had been brought in without any disturbance, thanks to Meg's password; but only a few guards of one of the numerous entrances had seen me. To the mass of the inhabitants I was an intruder. My anxiety may be imagined.

'Friends,' I said, 'I repeat that

it was Meg, one of your own people, who brought me in.'

'Meg? which Meg? there are ever so many Megs here.'

My perplexity was at its height when a happy thought suddenly struck me, and I inquired, 'Are all your Megs one antenna short?'

I received no immediate answer, but I heard the ants talking to each other in low voices, and I made out that there was discussion going on, in which the words 'old Meg' recurred again and again. Presently the voices died away in the distance.

I lay awake in a state of great anxiety for some time, and at the slightest noise I imagined that the ants had returned in force to break into my room and murder me. Why had I not thought to ask Meg to pass the night within call, so that I might have appealed to her if necessary? But one cannot foresee everything. One fear after another now oppressed me: perhaps my companion of the previous night had forgotten me, and would leave the ants' nest without me; or perhaps she would not remember where she had left me; or some accident might happen to her before the morning—she was but mortal after all. In any case I might consider my fate sealed. I thought of trying an escape, but what difficulties would encompass

any such attempt! It would be better to wait and see how things turned out.

At last I fell into a troubled sleep. Terrible dreams haunted my repose: I was again upon

the raft on which I had passed the previous night. Suddenly on the edge of the water-lily leaf a hideous head appeared with its eyes fixed upon mine. This head was of huge dimensions, and the



eyes glared upon me like live coals. I turned to flee, and on the other side rose a similar head with the same burning eyes; then the water suddenly became alive with quite a circle of horrible heads, their glittering eyes all fixed on me. I uttered a despairing cry for help; then the ant

appeared beside me, and pointing to a big hole she had made in the middle of the leaf, whispered, 'Let us escape through that—we will dive.' Then I felt her drawing me down to the bottom of the water by one leg; I struggled to go up again, but as I did so I found myself in the grasp of hundreds

of claws, which dragged me down, down, lower, lower, lower. I was choking. Then a spider appeared on the scene, looked at me with a sneer, and said, 'I warned you, cricket; what do you want to do amongst the ants? You will be eaten alive, and a good riddance too.' Then, without knowing how I got there, I found myself in a narrow prison, and knew that the door which shut me in was gradually yielding to the combined efforts of crowds of furious ants shouting, 'Eat him! devour him!' whilst I, crouching in a corner, cried, 'Mercy! you know that Meg, one of your own people, brought me here. Go and fetch her! Merry! help! Meg! help!' But suddenly Meg's own voice broke in upon my dream with the words,

'Come, cricket, wake; it is time to get up.'

As she spoke she broke down the barricade which served as a door to my room.

'Well,' she said, 'what kind of a night have you had?'

'Ah,' I cried, 'it is you, Meg, it's time you came.'

'What do you mean, friend?'

'I mean—I mean—that I was impatiently waiting for you. Has anything happened in the ants' nest during the night?'

'Nothing that I know of. Have you been disturbed?'

'No, not exactly disturbed. I heard steps in the passage once.'

'It was only the watch going their rounds, I expect.'

'Ah, well, perhaps so.'

'Why, you are quite bathed in perspiration.'

'I found my room rather close; it is very warm here.'

'I have brought you your breakfast,' said Meg, fetching what looked like a little white stone from outside. 'When you have appeased your hunger we will go

round the colony, and I'll show you all our curiosities.'

'What is that little stone?' I inquired.

'It's sugar,' she replied, 'good white sugar, taste it, friend, and when you've finished it you'll lick your paws, I'll be bound.'

The terrors of the night had not spoilt my appetite, and I did full justice to the breakfast provided for me.

'It is delicious, this sugar,' I observed; 'I never tasted anything like it before. Where did you get it?'

'Ah, ah!' she laughed, 'it suits your palate, does it? It's a dainty we reserve for our young larvae and our special friends. It is difficult enough to get. We have to fetch it from the big house, you know, which is a good way off. It is a hazardous expedition, undertaken by none but the boldest and sharpest amongst us.'

'You seem to venture great distances on your expeditions.'

'We let our young folks go where they like.'

'If I understand rightly, you are one of the elders of the colony?'

'O, yes, I am one of the oldest members of our family; that accounts for my having lost a limb.'

'Ah, yes,' I said; 'I see you have only one antenna.'

'I lost the other ever such a time ago in a battle. I missed it dreadfully at first. I could hardly distinguish between different scents, and my sense of hearing was also considerably dulled; but gradually the antenna which remained to me acquired by practice great delicacy of perception.'

I looked at Meg in surprised inquiry. She observed that I did so, and replied,

'Don't you know that it is with our antennae that we distinguish between scents and sounds?'

'I smell and hear,' I rejoined, 'but I have never cared to inquire with which part of my body I do so.'

'Well, friend, it's with your antennæ, so you'll know another time. Now that you've done your breakfast,' she added, 'you can follow me, and I'll do the honours of our colony. And first I'll show you the place where we educate our larvæ. It's in the upper story, it is true, but we ought to begin with it, for if we put off going we might find it empty.'

With that Meg led the way, and I followed her.

The streets were now beginning to fill. I have already explained that the evening before we had gone down into the very bottom of the ants' nest. I had then merely glanced at the arrangement of the chambers, but now I observed that the town consisted of a considerable number of stories piled one upon the other, and that the lower apartments were connected with the upper by a series of vertical passages without steps, the ants scaling them quite easily. My superior bulk, and the impossibility of my climbing up what appeared to me like the walls of wells, compelled us to make many *détours* and to select the wider and less steep of the passages. This suggested the reflection that if I had carried out my idea of a nocturnal flight I should certainly never have found my way out of this confusing labyrinth. I have said that the streets were beginning to fill. At every step we met ants hurrying along with a busy air, most of them carrying heavy loads. Amongst the large red ants, forming the bulk of the population, I noticed another variety, which seemed to live on good terms with their companions. I passed

one cell containing a huge white larva with a yellow head a good deal bigger than myself, and not very unlike the cockchafer larvæ I had seen at my cousin's, the mole-cricket, only it was more hairy and more squat. I also noticed some other very singular-looking larvæ, with their bodies cased in black and apparently strong sheaths covered with raised patterns. The head and legs alone protruded from these sheaths.

I begged Meg to tell me all about these strange visitors.

'Presently,' she replied, 'we shall have time to examine everything thoroughly. We must make haste now to the nurseries, or we shall find them empty.'

This was the second time she had expressed a fear of finding these nurseries empty if we lost time in going to them. Here was a mystery I was at a loss to fathom.

The greater number of the ants we passed as we went along looked at me either indifferently or with surprise, and merely wished Meg a friendly good-day. Others asked in a low voice who I was, but I am bound to say that my appearance in the streets of their town provoked neither insult nor complaint. It was evident that 'old Meg' was held in general esteem, and her assurance that I ran no risk in accepting her invitation to go home had evidently been well founded.

At last we arrived at one of the long galleries, and here an extraordinary scene met my eyes. The walls and countless cells opening on to the galleries were lined with a multitude of little white worms, some of which were so small as to be almost invisible. The larger ones were about the size of ants. By each worm stood an ant, feeding the little creature from its own mouth with what I ascertained to be a kind of sweet syrup.

I forgot to say that as we entered the galleries several ants had run up to us with most threatening gestures; but Meg had advanced to meet them and had mollified them, probably by telling them that I was a friend, for they at once retired and resumed their interrupted promenade.

'All the little grubs you see here,' explained Meg, 'are our larvae; they are of every variety of age, some having only just come out of the egg, whilst others have attained to nearly their full size, that big fellow near you, for instance, is now being fed for the last time. To-morrow it must begin to spin its cocoon and change into a pupa.'

Struck dumb with surprise I stared silently at Meg, who went on, 'Presently I will show you the cells for our pupæ and those for our eggs; but now watch what is going on here.'

The ants who had rushed forwards when we entered were walking up and down, taking no part in the work of the nurses, and I now learnt that they were a corps of soldiers told off to keep guard over the refectories. Other ants, acting as domestic servants, were cleaning the rooms, setting everything in its place, and clearing away all rubbish.

'The ants who take care of the little ones are probably their mothers?' I observed.

'Not a bit of it,' answered Meg. 'All the nurses you see there are spinsters, and spinsters they'll remain to the end of their lives. Mothers don't take care of their children themselves except when they go away to found new colonies. In old and densely populated settlements such as this they have nothing to do but to lay their eggs.'

'How astonishing! And what do the males do?'

'O, they don't work either. All our public offices, both civil

and military, are held by what we call *seuters*, who are neither male nor female. I myself am an old spinster. Our males, and those females amongst us who are destined to marry, have wings.'

'Did I understand you to say those who are destined to marry?'

'Yes, and as soon as they are married we pull out their wings—that is, unless they pull them out for themselves, as most of them do.'

'And how about the males?'

'Once they are married we never see them again. I must explain that our marriages are contracted outside the colony.'

'And the husbands never return?'

'Never. We should kill them if they attempted to do so.'

'Why?'

'Because our males don't work, and we don't care to keep paupers.'

'How very wonderful!'

The ants now suddenly began to run about, touching each other with their antennæ, and in a moment the refectory became a scene of great animation, crowds of ants at the same time pouring in from every entrance.

'They are going to take away the children,' explained Meg.

At a second signal the nurses, assisted by the new-comers, picked up the grubs and began to carry them off. The smallest were taken by one porter, but some of the bigger ones required the united assistance of two or three ants. At first there was great confusion, but very soon all fell into their places, and the procession moved off in the most admirable order.

I looked inquiringly at Meg.

'They are going to take them to the upper story, where they will get the warmth of the sun,' she replied. 'Now let's go and see the pupæ, for they will soon be carried off too.'

We went into some other apart-

ments, where we found no nurses, but only guards and cleaners. As before the former rushed threateningly towards us, but again Meg appeased them with a few words.

The ground was strewn with numerous round white masses, looking like big eggs or rather bags. My companion explained to me that these bags, consisting of a close and very fine silken

web, each contain a full-grown ant larva. The web, she added, is spun by the larva itself, and when it is completely enveloped it remains motionless for a few days, gradually assuming the appearance of an ant with its antennae and legs tucked against its body. When the right moment arrives the cocoon is opened at one end by the neuters, and the



ant, still enclosed in its pupa skin, is drawn out. The skin is then removed, and the perfect insect is taken up into the sunshine, that its limbs, still feeble and of a whitish hue, may there dry and acquire their due strength and proper colour.

Presently a scene similar to that I had witnessed in the nursery of the larvae was enacted here. A body of ants rushed in and carried off the pupae.

A little farther on I saw the opening of a number of the cocoons containing pupae which had reached their full development. Some of the workers tore open one end of the silken cocoons with their mandibles, and drew out the pupae, which they then relieved of a thin pellicle or filmy skin with

which they were covered. That done, they pulled out the legs and antennae of the newly developed ants, and carried them off to place them in the sun.

'We have still to visit the egg-room,' observed Meg; 'it is close by here.'

We had but a few steps to go before we found ourselves in the room alluded to.

Here and there rose piles of eggs, and in the centre of the apartment a number of neuters or workers were following an ant of much larger dimensions than themselves. This was a mother, who at each step laid an egg, which was at once picked up by her attendants and taken to one of the piles. Other neuters were

busily engaged at these piles in taking up the eggs one by one, and gently passing them between their mandibles, moistening them as they did so with their saliva.

I inquired the object of this operation, and, to my great surprise, was informed that it is indispensable to the due development of the reproductive germ, that the saliva thus applied makes the egg increase in size, giving it also greater transparency, consistency, and milkiness; and lastly, that after the washing the egg is soon hatched, which would not be the case if it were left to itself.

'Well, I must leave you now,' said Meg at last: 'I must go to work; for old as I am I am not allowed to sit with crossed legs doing nothing. With us laziness is looked upon as a crime, and punished with death.'

I asked her if I should be in any danger during her absence; to which she replied,

'Don't be afraid; every one in the ant-hill is now informed of your presence amongst us. You are free to go wherever you like unmolested. This evening or to-morrow morning I will show you over the rest of our colony. You can either walk about our passages, retire to your own room, or take a turn outside—in a word, do just as the humour takes you.'

'That being the case,' I replied, 'I'll go and get some air; I shall not be sorry to see the sun again, and as you will be occupied till the evening I will spend the day out of doors. But, by the way, if I don't see you till it gets dark, how am I to find my room again?'

'You can ask the first ant you see, and he'll show you the way. But now, *adieu*!'

As she spoke Meg hurried away; and, following the train of workmen carrying out the pupæ and larvæ, I gained one of the doors, and was soon outside the ant-hill.





THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER XVII.

DREAMS OF GRANDEUR.

It was a fine morning, and having climbed on to the top of the accumulation of sticks and twigs which rose like a dome above the colony of the ants, I looked attentively about me.

How different did everything appear to me now! The wood was cheerfully lit up by the sunbeams; the ant-hill seen by daylight had lost the threatening aspect it had worn in the doubtful moonlight, and I could not help laughing at the recollection of my terrors and the gloomy reflections they had inspired. 'How our views of things change,' I said to myself, 'according to the circumstances in which we find ourselves, such as the time of day, whether we are hot or cold, tired or hungry, and so forth!' The ants I had so much dreaded were now swarming beneath me; the transportation of the pupæ and larvæ was going on uninterruptedly; the whole of that side of the ant-hill which faced

the east was alive with a teeming population working without one moment's cessation.

From the commanding position I occupied I could see the whole of the clearing, and the numerous paths leading from the colony and branching off in every direction towards the wood. These paths were already crowded with ants on their way to seek food.

As I stood thus looking down upon the animated scene, a few of the workers engaged in carrying the larvæ approached me, and politely begged me to give them a little music.

Have I already mentioned that my talents as a musician are of no ordinary description? If not, it is time that I did so. It will be remembered that one evening in my childhood I had been vividly impressed by the song of a nightingale. On my return home that night, after the terrible scene described at the beginning of this

narrative, a new passion possessed my soul, and my eager wish to acquire the talent I had heard exercised deprived me of the power of rest. Every spare moment was now devoted to practising an art

for which my taste was recognised. The isolation to which I was condemned by my brothers' prejudice against me to some extent favoured the cultivation of my pet study, and I soon acquired



considerable skill. I had not my equal in the execution of an *arpeggio*, and no one could shake better than I. I knew how to make a most effective pause; but it was in my mode of bringing out the final *C* that I was most entirely unsurpassed.

As I have just said, I was in-

vited to perform by some ants. I was the more disposed to gratify them as I had had no opportunity of indulging in my favourite pastime for the last few days. I made a sign that I was going to begin; and after a few rapid scales interspersed with an occasional sonorous shake, just to

show off the correctness of my ear, I struck up a sweet and melodious song—a kind of slow metopeia, calculated to throw my hearers into that peculiar state of nerveless languor from which a clever performer can so easily rouse his audience into noisy and eager enthusiasm. Presently, warming to my work by degrees, I indulged in a few brilliant flights. I performed the sharillest roulades, and my hurried notes, now deep, now high, resounded to the very borders of the clearing, and awoke the echoes of the usually silent wood.

The ants, pausing in their work, gradually gathered round me; parties on the eve of starting on expeditions paused to listen, and then retraced their steps; whilst those still indoors, hearing the unusual sounds, rushed out from every gallery to ascertain their cause. In a few moments I was surrounded by a vast crowd. The butterflies, flies, and bees which were collecting food in the neighbourhood, seeing from the distance the huge assemblage of which I was the centre, came to hover above me, and ascertain what it was which had caused so much excitement amongst the ants, generally so orderly and self-possessed.

My success was prodigious. I had the sense, however, to stop in time, and not to risk lessening the enthusiasm I had aroused by too sustained an effort. At the end, therefore, of a more triumphant shake than ever, I brought out my final C, and paused in such a manner as to bring out all its beauty. With this a perfect frenzy seemed to possess the ants. They all rushed upon me at once, climbing one upon the other, and in a few minutes I was covered with them; whilst others, slipping under my feet, literally raised me

from the ground. My only regret was that the spider was not there to witness my triumph.

It was evident that I might now hope to take a very good position amongst the ants. I might settle finally in their colony as ordinary and extraordinary musician to the republic, and lead an easy life. The prospect of a series of such ovations as that of which I had just been the object was far from disagreeable to me. I was sure of being well taken care of, well fed, and of being crammed with sugar every day. A music-loving people, able to appreciate talent, such as the ants had just proved themselves to be, could do no less, for the sake of retaining amongst them an artist whose claims to respect had just been proved with so much *éclat*. And who could tell but that some day the ants might tire of the republican form of government?

And why not? I should make as good a king any day as one of themselves—better, in fact, for I had one undeniable advantage over them in my size, my dignity, in a word, in a certain distinguished air wanting to any of them. I was of another race, other blood than theirs flowed in my veins, an advantage not to be despised, as all the world knows. And then, best reason of all, I could amuse them! True, my knowledge of politics, of government, of war, was not very extensive, but how should they know that? That was my business, and I need not proclaim it on the house-tops. I had but to keep silence in council and to shake my head now and then, which would give me at once the appearance of a profound, thoughtful, and prudent cricket. As for war, the ants could take to fighting when they liked, there was no need for me to figure as a hero in the field of battle.

There are many ways of being great, and I should shine best in peace. Ha, ha! friend spider! you will be finely surprised to find me king of the ants some day! And my relations, my unworthy brothers—how easy it would be to revenge myself upon them, to make them bitterly rue their misdeeds! But no, far be it from me to harbour a thought so unworthy to my character! I would content myself with going to seek them accompanied by an imposing escort. I would collect them round me, tell them of the exalted position to which I had been raised by my own merits alone, reproach them for the injuries they had done me, and then pardon them. Is not the magnanimity of the powerful the noblest, the most beautiful, and the rarest of virtues?

After having thanked the ants for the flattering manifestations of which I had been the object, I begged them to resume their interrupted occupations, and as I made them a dignified bow of farewell it seemed to me as if I were already in the position I might some day be called upon to fill.

Those who read these memoirs may perhaps set me down as ambitious. But let any such imagine themselves in my place. Let them point out to me any one who would not be intoxicated by public applause, and who could retain his calmness of judgment in the thick of an ovation from an excited crowd.

Gradually the ants retired, and I was left alone. I thought I would take a stroll in the clearing, which was just the place for a walk, as the soil was dry, and there were only a few stunted plants growing here and there.

I reached the borders of the wood without difficulty, but I contented myself with skirting round it without entering it. Now

and then I crossed a path alive with ants, and paused a moment to watch them going and coming, now exchanging a few words with each other, now hurrying on again with a busy air, some carrying loads, others dragging along some object too heavy to be lifted.

In this walk I noticed one thing which interested me deeply.

Rounding a bush, my sense of smell—I mean my antennæ, since, according to Meg, we smell with them—was disagreeably affected by a putrid odour puffed into my face by the wind. I soon ascertained where the fetid effluvia came from. Near me lay the corpse of a field-mouse, the decomposition of which was being greatly accelerated by the heat. I was about to make a detour to avoid the unpleasant smell, when the body of the little creature seemed to move. I stopped in astonishment, thinking I must be the dupe of a delusion; but no, it moved again. I was certainly not mistaken. There could be no doubt that it was dead, that the disagreeable odour proceeded from it. Yet it moved!

Whilst I was carefully examining it, trying to find the key to the mystery, I saw issue from beneath it a good-sized black beetle with two bands of bright reddish-orange colour on its back and with yellow-tipped antennæ.

'Bother,' he observed, as if speaking to some one I could not see; 'we two can never manage it alone; let's go for help.'

'Do you imagine,' answered a voice which seemed to come from beneath the corpse, 'that we shall find friends in the neighbourhood?'

'Wait for me,' was the reply; 'I'll go and see.'

'But,' remonstrated the other, 'suppose the body should be stolen in your absence?'

'Never you fear, friend; it's

broad daylight. Carrion crows are the only creatures likely to play us such a trick, and I don't see any about.'

'Go, then,' answered the voice from underground, 'and come back as quickly as you can.'

With that the beetle I had seen spread his wings, and turning his back on the clearing, flew over the coppice.

This fragment of conversation puzzled me greatly. I went round the mouse, so as to get to windward, and avoid the unpleasant odour, and as I did so a second beetle, just like the first, came out from beneath it.

He did not at first notice me, so busy was he examining the corpse. He climbed upon it and ran along just as if he were measuring its length. Then he growled between his teeth, 'Bother, it will be very hard work; let's hope he'll meet some friends. Unless seven or eight of us attack it, we shall never get done. But what a windfall for our children! It'll be hard work, though.' Here he noticed me, and after giving me a good stare without speaking he slid back to the ground, and squatted down upon it, as if waiting for his companion.

I was most anxious to know what these two insects were plotting in connection with the dead body, which they were so afraid of having stolen from them. Why had one of them gone for help, and what kind of service did they hope to receive from their friends? If they meant to eat the mouse I could well understand their saying, 'We two can never manage it alone, let's go for help.' But then why did the other murmur, 'What a windfall for our children'? I was altogether at a loss. The simplest mode to get the explanation I wanted was to ask for it. This I did.

'You are expecting friends,' I began; 'if I heard rightly just now, your friend is gone to issue invitations for dinner.'

'That is my husband,' answered the beetle, 'and I hope he will meet plenty of our friends. A dozen will not be too many for the work we have to do.'

'You are speaking of the banquet you are going to offer them. But your mouse does not seem to me quite—what shall I say!—fresh. Is it?'

'You are all wrong, cricket, we have not the slightest intention of eating this mouse.'

'O, I beg your pardon; I thought I understood that you had. It is a little high.'

'Wrong again. Though we don't mean to eat it ourselves, we shall keep it for our children.'

'I am more at a loss than ever,' I observed; 'pray explain yourself.'

'Well, then, I am going to lay my eggs in this corpse, and from my eggs will proceed larvæ which will feed upon it.'

'Ah, indeed! Well, you must excuse my saying that your children's meat will be high enough by that time.'

'They will like it.'

'Will they really? Quite a matter of taste. But what have your friends to do with it all?'

'They will help us to bury this body.'

'What?'

'I say they will help us to bury this body. You will readily understand that I sha'n't leave it on the ground like this, for the first crow who happens to pass to devour it. If I did, there would be an end to my little family.'

'I am curious to see how you will set about the burial.'

'Well, your curiosity will be gratified directly, for there comes my husband with several friends'

'Excuse me, just one other question.'

'Well, proceed.'

'What is your name?'

'Necrophorus.'

'Thank you.'

The necrophorus who had gone to look for friends had now returned, accompanied by a dozen comrades, who alighted round the body of the mouse. They were evidently aware of the nature of the service expected from them, for without a word they slid beneath the corpse, whilst I remained alone, eagerly watching for the operation I had been warned to expect.

The necrophori had no sooner disappeared under the mouse's body before the latter began to oscillate perceptibly, whilst at the same time a rampart of loose

earth, gradually increasing in size, was formed around it.

As the rampart grew in height and breadth the mouse gradually sank, and I guessed that the necrophori had undermined the ground beneath it by throwing out the earth on which it rested. Presently the corpse had sunk low enough for the rampart of loose earth to rise above it, and this rampart then began gradually to fall in upon it. The necrophori worked on without a moment's cessation, and the actual interment began.

I watched the operation with intense interest. Gradually the body sank, gradually the earth rolled down upon it, until at last it disappeared entirely. It was completely and skilfully buried.



CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IMPERTINENT FELLOW.

THE afternoon was spent in strolling about and examining all manner of things. In one place, where the soil was very sandy, I saw some round holes, which seemed very deep. I was wondering what they could be, when I saw a round flat head, armed with great bent and sharply-pointed mandibles, appear at the opening of one of them. This head was exactly the same size as the opening, which it completely closed; and, thanks to this and to its yellowish colour, it was scarcely distinguishable from its surroundings. This strange head stared at me.

'Who are you,' I inquired, 'and what are you doing there?'

'I am lying in wait for ants,' was the reply; 'I am the larva of a cicenda beetle.'

'What,' I exclaimed, 'the larva of a pretty green tiger beetle, spotted with white, which runs very rapidly?'

'Just so.'

'And thus is how you catch ants? You lie in ambush, and when they pass your way you spring upon them.'

'Not a bit of it; my legs are much too short for jumping. I never leave my hole.'

'How do you manage, then?'

'I wait until an ant runs on to my head; then I suddenly let myself sink down—the ant loses its balance, and falls into my pit. Then I seize it, and devour it at my ease.'

'You might have to wait a long time; and if you have no other means of subsistence, you must lead a dull life.'

'Not so dull as you would suppose. It's true I don't get a meal every day; but what am I

to do? My legs are too short to catch ants in fair chase; and besides, my body is protected by no armour. If I were to venture out of my harbour of refuge, those confounded ants, who know me well, would soon tear me to pieces.'

'But I suppose it must be only by chance, and by a rare chance, that an ant happens to run over your head?'

'O, I have not set my trap at haphazard. It is now dug in the middle of one of the ants' paths. I get as many as I want on a sunny day. Look, there is one coming now. I'll wager it runs on to my head.'

The cicendela was right; the ant did run over his head, but for all that he let it escape.

'There,' he observed, 'didn't I tell you so?'

'Why, you might have caught it,' I replied.

'Of course I might, but I've had plenty to eat to-day. When I spoke of fasting, I should have added that I do so only on wet days.'

'It doesn't matter either way,' I answered; 'anyhow, yours is but a tame existence.'

'Maybe; but I sha'n't pass my whole life in this hole, and the day will come when I shall be able to pursue the game for which I am now obliged to lie in wait.'

'Well,' I reflected, as I turned away, 'all creatures seem to console themselves for present ills by the hope of some other life. Yesterday it was the ant lion, to-day it is the cicendela, and to-morrow it will be some one else, and so on.'

I had not gone ten steps when a new sight met my eyes.

At a little distance from me were two coleoptera, apparently of the scarabæi family, who were engaged in a task which seemed completely to absorb their attention, and to require all the strength of which they were possessed.

They were little creatures, about the size of my hand, quite black, and almost round, only the last segment of their bodies tapered slightly. Their legs were long and curved, especially the hindmost pair.

When I first caught sight of them they were engaged—one pulling, the other pushing—in trying to get along a brownish ball, which seemed to me to be made of hardened earth. They were struggling to climb a pretty steep ruck, and the efforts they were making to get their load to the top were really marvellous. Again and again the ball slipped from their clutches and rolled back; but in spite of repeated failures they applied themselves to their task again with unabated courage.

Although I had not the slightest notion what they were driving at, I became interested in the success of their undertaking. When, therefore, I saw them at last pause to take breath, with the difficulty still unconquered, and then again set to work, encouraging each other by voice and gesture, I could no longer refrain from going to help them. Running up to them, I lent my head against the ball, and putting out all my strength, I quickly succeeded in getting on to the ridge they wanted to reach. All this took place so rapidly that it was not until the deed was done that I noticed something which would have damped my ardour had I known it a little sooner.

A very disagreeable odour, of a

nature not to be mistaken, proceeded from the ball.

My dislike to unpleasant odours, and my horror of touching anything from which they proceed, are well known. When, therefore, the beetles thanked me for my efficient help, I drew back a little, so as to get to windward of the object, and made a significant grimace.

At this the beetles, or rather, to give them their proper title, the silphææ, looked at me and laughed.

'What are you going to do with that ball?' I inquired.

'We have laid an egg in it,' replied one, 'and when it is hatched the young larva which will proceed from it will find itself in the midst of plenty of food. We take all this trouble for each one of our eggs. We spare no pains, as you perceive, to assure a comfortable life to our children. That's the way with the whole of the beetle family.'

'I can't say much for the refinement of your offsprings' taste,' I replied.

'That's a point we need not discuss,' replied the silphææ. 'It is merely a matter of habit or education, and the odour repugnant to the olfactory sense of one is grateful to that of another. In acting as you have seen us do we perform an office necessary in the very order of things, that office being to remove and turn to account what has been left by others as superfluous or useless.'

'All very plausible,' I observed; 'but that does not explain why you take such a deal of trouble to remove the ball a long distance off, when you might every bit as well leave it where you made it.'

'What we mean to do,' rejoined the beetle, 'is to bury it in the hole you see down there. But for that precaution we might see it carried off by the first hungry

fellow who should happen to take a fancy to it.'

I thought of the necrophori I had lately seen, who had been working with a similar end in view; and I could not help laughing at the beetles' fear that their noisome pill would be stolen from them.

'Yours is but a sorry trade,' I observed.

'You think so, do you, cricket? Know then that the trade you so

much despise won the highest honours for our ancestors amongst men in olden times. There is a tradition current with us that a powerful ancient people numbered us amongst its gods. Now what do you say to that? I don't think I ever heard of a cricket being deified, eh, did you?

'No, I can't say I ever did; but what gained you such a signal honour?'

'Well, I believe we were looked



upon as the emblem of the sun, the harbingers of the spring; in a word, the precursors of the renovation of all things. To our worshippers the ball we roll along was considered a type of the world, and the young beetle it contains a symbol of a being spontaneously generated by the forces of Nature, the embodiment of vital force.'

'All very pretty. But from what you say, I should not be a bit surprised if other human races

had worshipped crickets, only the tradition is lost; and do what I will, I can't honestly lay claim to any such noble origin.'

'Our origin,' replied the beetle, drawing itself up, 'is well known, and of undoubted authenticity. Do you know of any insects of a race as illustrious as ours?'

Truth compelled me to own that I did not.

As I left the beetles I bowed solemnly to these descendants of gods.

'I don't envy their lot, for all that,' I said to myself. 'Whatever they may say about it, there is but a sorry trade. It may be that they were looked upon as gods in olden times, but now—ideas change as the world goes on. As for me, they remind me of the poor fellows who can only work at night.'

I had a good many more meetings in my walk, amongst others with a little mole who had tumbled on his back, and couldn't right himself because of the shortness of his legs. I was running to his assistance, when I saw him suddenly strike out, balance himself for a moment on the two extremities of his body, and then dropping himself down, as if he had let loose a spring, he struck the ground with the middle of his back, which sent him bounding into the air in a very funny fashion, and brought him down upon his feet. I was struck dumb with astonishment at this result, for never before had I seen such peculiar jumping.

A little further on a bombardier beetle attracted my attention. I did not then know the name of the pretty little creature, but learnt it afterwards. It was running before me, and resembled a carabus in general form, though it was smaller. Its body was red, and its elytra were deep blue. In its jaws it carried an ant which it had doubtless just put to death. In rounding a stone it came upon some dozen ants walking backwards. They stopped suddenly and turned round. The position of the bombardier beetle, taken, so to speak, in the very act of murder, was not enviable. I quickened my steps, anxious to see the issue of the meeting, which I thought would be fatal to the beetle. But things turned out very differently from my expectations.

The ants did not lose much time in closing upon their enemy, whom they evidently considered already their prey. At a signal from one of their party they formed themselves into a circle round their intended victim, and charged upon him all at once; but the beetle, rising on his hind legs, discharged upon the nearest what looked like a little bluish smoke. It came from the lower end of his body with a slight explosion. The bombardier beetle, wheeling round, treated each of his adversaries to a similar discharge, and the ants, taken aback by such a very extraordinary mode of defence, ran off as fast as their legs would carry them, leaving their adversary master of the field.

'Bravo, bravo, friend!' I exclaimed, astonished at this result. 'Allow me to compliment you on your splendid victory. You have an unrivalled weapon at your command.'

'I only made a little smoke,' replied the beetle, 'but you see that was enough.'

'Quite enough. Do show me the weapon you used.'

'I can't. I carry it inside my body; it is a little sac filled with an extremely volatile fluid, which is converted into vapour as soon as it comes in contact with the outer air.'

'And this vapour is of course very pungent and offensive, as it put the ants to flight?'

'Judge for yourself,' rejoined the beetle; and as he spoke the traitor turned round, and coming quite close to me gave me a discharge full in the face. I was half suffocated. The bluish vapour emitted an acid and horrible odour. When I recovered consciousness I saw the wicked rogue running off, laughing to himself at the trick he had just played me. 'Impudent rascal!' I shouted after

him. 'It's easy to see you belong to the carabus family. I shall meet you again some day, you may be bound. I've got an old score to settle with your family.'

I looked round to see if any one had been a witness of the insult the wretch had put upon me, which would greatly have added to my mortification, but fortunately there was nobody about. The ants were already a good distance off, and I was very glad of it.

I was now a long way from the ant-hill, and as it was beginning to get dusk I thought I would go quietly back to the centre of the clearing. The beeches at the foot of which the ants had established their colony stood out distinctly in their isolation in the centre of the treeless space, so there was no fear of my losing my way.

Near the ant-hill I noticed two pretty beetles of rather squat forms resting on some short grass. Their elytra were of a beautiful yellow colour with four large black spots. I was surprised to see them there, and could not help exclaiming,

'You are very bold to venture here, don't you know that you are quite close to an ants' nest? and you run a great risk of being devoured if you stay where you are.'

'We have nothing to fear from

the ants,' was the reply; 'we have known them long, and are on the best of terms with them. In fact we spend the greater part of our lives amongst them. As larvae we live in their colony.'

'O, that alters the case, of course. I knew nothing about that.'

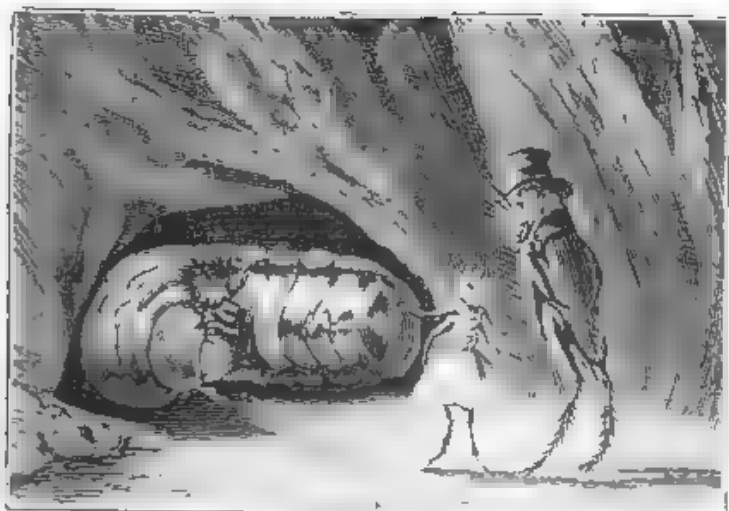
'We render services to them,' added the beetle I had addressed, 'and we of the clythridæ or ant-beetle family and ants have always understood each other very well.'

I left the ant-beetles with an assurance that nothing but the interest I felt in them would have led me to warn them of the danger in which I had supposed them to be, adding that as they were after all in no peril that I hoped they would pardon my remarks.

When it became dark I reentered the ant-hill, satisfied with all that I had seen and learnt, the trick played me by the bombardier-beetle having been about the only disagreeable incident of my walk.

Some of the ants running about in the streets pointed out the way to my room, which, thanks to them, I found without difficulty, and having barricaded the door, I settled myself to pass a second night in my new quarters.

(To be continued.)



THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE QUESTS OF THE ANTS.

THE night passed over more peacefully for me than the first had done. No noise or incident of any kind disturbed my repose. If the watch went their rounds in the night I did not hear them. Meg came to wake me as she had done the previous day, and brought me as before a large piece of sugar for breakfast. I asked her what she had been doing when out of my sight yesterday, and she replied that she had been amongst the audience at the concert I had given, that she had assisted at my triumph, had rejoiced with me, and had been much complimented on account of the distinguished artist she had been the means of introducing.

'I must warn you, though,' she went on, 'that you have made a few enemies. I am told that you were present yesterday at a fight between a bombardier beetle and a dozen of our people, a fight in which the latter were worsted,

and that you shouted "Bravo!" to the victor. Is this true?'

'There is some truth in it,' I replied, 'but I protest against the interpretation which has been given to a somewhat thoughtless exclamation of mine, which had reference less to the vanquisher of the ants than to his wonderful mode of defending himself. Are you acquainted with the ways of bombardier beetles?'

'Perfectly. The ants which attacked me yesterday were inexperienced young things, who did not know with whom they had to deal. As for the share you took in the matter, I advise you to be more careful in future. Ants, especially young ants, are very sensitive, and without intending it you might be drawn into an awkward quarrel.'

At this moment the recollection of the spider's warning flashed across my mind: 'Beware how you tread on their corns,' she had

said, and I felt that she had been right.

I assured Meg that I would now exercise the greatest circumspection in my dealings with her fellow-citizens, and she fully approved my resolution.

As soon as I had finished breakfast we left my room, to continue our inspection of the colony, of which I had as yet only seen the upper chambers reserved to the eggs, larvæ, and pupæ. As I followed Meg I was able to note more closely than I could the previous evening all the details of the construction of the ants' nest.

My room, as I have already stated, was situated on the basement of the establishment, that is to say on a level with the large hall, which was built actually on the old beech trunk, serving as its floor.

I noticed that the colony was built partly above and partly below the level of the ground.

The roads, the cells, and the store-rooms of the subterranean portion were hollowed out of the soil, which had accumulated about the trunk after the felling of the huge tree, of which it had formed the base.

The upper part of the nest was, however, entirely the work of its inhabitants, who had built it up of an innumerable quantity of twigs and sticks arranged so as to form passages, rooms, and cells of every variety of size, all presenting considerable solidity, and so constructed as to keep the rain out almost entirely.

'Our town,' Meg informed me, 'is very ancient. The time of its foundation is lost in the mists of antiquity, and tradition is mute as to even the approximate date of its origin.'

'But,' I observed, 'has there been nothing in its history to

mark its chronology? Has no event occurred to break the ordinary routine of its existence?'

'O, of course,' answered Meg, 'we have had frequent revolutions, risings, *coups d'états*, and so forth. There have been street-fights, massacres, murders, crimes of every variety. We have had wars too with the neighbouring republic. We have often been invaded, and have only purchased peace at an enormous sacrifice. An ant's life is not all *couleur de rose*. One day—it was ever so long before I was born, but the story was handed down from the old folks, who heard it from their elders—a terrible catastrophe all but did for our colony. It came one morning. Our people were busy as usual carrying the eggs, larvæ, and pupæ to the upper story, when a sudden shock shook the whole place to its foundation. The terror produced by this extraordinary event had not subsided when a second, more violent than the first, told the horror-stricken inhabitants that a crisis had come. At the same moment a sinking took place in the upper stories, and the ants realised that part of them had been actually swept away. The cause of this remarkable event soon became evident: our ancestors were attacked by the most formidable of all our enemies—in a word, by a man!'

'A man! And for what reason?'

'To carry off the pupæ.'

'What did he want with them?'

'To give them to birds to eat.'

You know that many birds, especially young pheasants, nightingales, and others, which are often kept in captivity, are very fond of them, and men persecute us for their sakes. But to go on with my story: it was a very long time before the colony rallied from the misfortune which had overtaken it, and it was several years before

the nest, so cruelly ravaged, regained its old prosperity.

'Those human monsters have no consideration for us insects. And yet we are of service to them.'

'O, they think and call themselves the lords of creation.'

'And there is nobody to contradict them.'

'Well,' observed Meg, 'there's no denying that they are stronger, and I suppose I must also admit more intelligent, than we are. There is nothing on our side but superiority of numbers. I have been told that in some countries we have literally driven them before us, and compelled them to cede the soil to us.'

'Well,' I replied, 'I have never heard tell of men running away from crickets, but I have been told that some cousins of ours, locusts I think they are called, have often given them a good deal of trouble.'

'Have they indeed?'

'Yes; they sometimes come in such numbers that the light of the sun is darkened, they settle here and there about the country, and when they fly away leave absolute desolation behind them. I expect men are the chief sufferers then.'

'Hasting thus we reached those parts of the ants' nest which I had not yet visited or had only hurried through.

'I must introduce you to our visitors,' said my companion, 'and you will see that the reputation we have for inhospitality is unfounded. And first, look at that rose-beetle larva; there are some twenty like it here.'

I looked, and there, lying in a big cell, lay the white hairy grub I had noticed the previous evening.

'From time immemorial,' said Meg, 'rose-beetle grubs have enjoyed our hospitality. Have you ever seen rose-beetles, Cricket?'

'O, yes, often; they are those pretty bright green coleoptera which frequent flowers. I had no idea, though, that their larvae lived with you.'

'Those of one species of their family spend the whole of their lives, two or three years, amongst us, and so do their pupæ.'

'Are they useful to you?'

'For all I know, not very.'

'I wonder that you keep them with you.'

'What would you have us do? We are used to them; we remember seeing them here from our very birth. They have acquired a right to our hospitality somehow, you may be sure. Our grandparents tolerated them, so we do the same.'

'And those others walking about there with their bodies enclosed in a kind of sheath?'

'Those are the larvae of ant-beetles.'

'Ah, indeed; they are also coleoptera: then I saw some of the perfect insects near here yesterday.'

'Do you mean yellow insects, with four black spots on their bodies?'

'Yes.'

'Their larvae relieve us of the cocoons of our pupæ when they have become useless, after the metamorphosis of their inmates, so that you see they are useful to us.'

'Why do they wear the kind of sheath in which their bodies are hidden?'

'O, I'm sure I don't know, unless it's as a protection to their skin, which is very thin. It's a family custom. The larvae of other members of the cixiidae family, which don't live with us,—there are a good many different species—and those of their cousins, and those of the cryptocephalæ, another numerous tribe, inhabit a sand shell, which they carry

about with them everywhere, as snails do theirs.'

'Like the caddis-fly larvæ which we saw in the pond?'

'Yes; and like a whole lot of the lepidoptera which go by the name of moths.'

'It's not a bad idea, either.

But to return to your guests - you have none but larvæ here?'

'Haven't we, though! Why, we have ever so many different varieties of the staphylinidæ family. Look, there are *lomachusæ*, *aleocharæ*, *myrmecodis*, *homolotæ*, *tachypori*, and *conuri*. They all



make themselves useful to us by removing the disused cocoons of pupæ and the emptied skins of larvæ. They save us the trouble of removing all that rubbish, in a word, they perform the office of scavengers.'

'Whatever are those?' I inquired of Meg, pointing to some little bright yellow beetle of rather peculiar form, which were walking along very slowly.

'Those are *claviger* beetles.'

'To judge by the size of their

antennæ their sense of hearing must be very acute.'

'Fortunately for them it is, for they are blind.'

'Blind!'

'Of course they are, for they have no eyes.'

'Of what use are they to you, then?'

'They secrete a liquid for us to drink, a kind of syrup with a delicious taste, so of course we take great care of them and think very highly of them. But let us go on. You see those little stag-beetles down there?'

'Yes, I see them; but I thought all stag-beetles lived in dung or dead animals. You support them as well, then?'

'A few, they render us the same services as the staphylini.'

'Why, look, there are some plant-lice!' I exclaimed, catching sight of a gallery quite full of those little insects. 'I did not expect to find them here.'

'Ha, ha! We are trying an experiment with them.'

'An experiment! What experiment?'

'Well, I'll explain. You must know that plant-lice, like claviger beetles, secrete a syrup of which we are very fond, which is contained in those two little tubes projecting from their tails. Whenever we find them on plants we tickle them with our antennæ to make them give us this syrup, which they can exude at will, and which they are, for the matter of that, quite ready to let us have. Now several families of ants living under the grass conceived the idea of keeping plant-lice with them to save themselves the trouble of going to fetch the syrup, and some of our young people have taken it into their heads to do the same. They won't succeed, as I have warned them, but they don't listen to me.'

'Why won't they succeed?'

'Because to keep plant-lice they must be able to feed them. The little ants who live under the grass place their plant-lice on the grass roots which penetrate into their passages. We are not similarly situated, we have no vegetable roots inside our nest; and as plant-lice can only live on the sap of plants, those you see there must die of hunger, which our young people don't seem to understand.'

'The young seldom will profit by the experience of the old. Experience must be bought. But what do I see there? More little beetles?'

'Yes; those are the small fry amongst our guests. They are cryptophagi, monotomi, lathridæ, &c. They all live on our leavings.'

'Just now I saw some black ants working amongst your people. How did they get here?'

'They are prisoners. We had a war a little while ago with some black ants living in the trunk of a tree not far from here. We beat them, and all the survivors were carried into captivity.'

'They don't seem to be ill-treated in any way.'

'O, no, they are not. They work with us, and we treat them just as if they belonged to our nation.'

'Do they regret the loss of their nationality?'

'They don't seem to. Most of them were hatched here, you see, they were brought here as pupæ, they find themselves very comfortable, and don't trouble themselves about what you are pleased to call the loss of their nationality.'

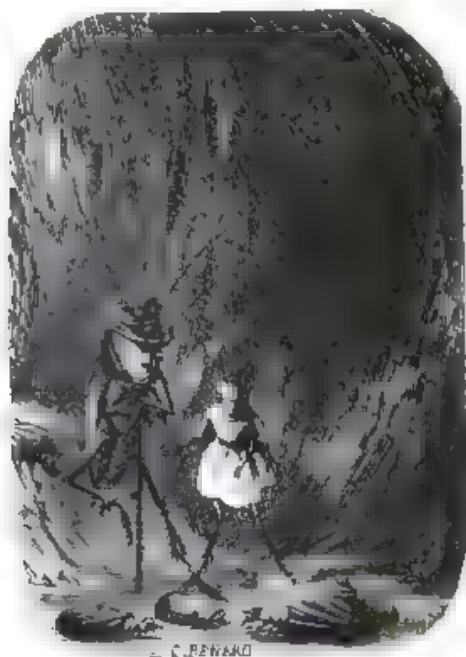
Chatting thus we arrived at one of the entrances of the ant-hill. The weather was still fine, and the carrying out of the larvae and pupæ was going on as usual.

I asked Meg if there was no fear of their being carried off by birds from such an exposed situation.

'O, we are not afraid of that,' was the answer, 'though a good many birds—nightingales, for instance—are very fond of our pupæ. You see to get at them here they would have to settle on the ant-hill, which they would not do with impunity. They don't care to run the risk of that. It would only be in case of our having to move that we should be in danger from the birds. During the war

with the black ants, which I was just telling you about, they carried off half the pupæ we had captured. But here we are in the open air; go and give us a little more music up there; I must be off to my work.'

I took up the position I had occupied the day before and began to sing. I was quite as successful as I had been at first, but the novelty of my performance had worn off, and instead of an ovation I only received a little applause.



CHAPTER XX.

WAR.

SEVERAL days passed by without any incident worthy of note. I gave my usual concert every morning, and then walked about until the evening.

I saw the cicendela larvæ again, and I also met a good many other

insects, whose habits interested me deeply; but, not to spin out my narrative too much, I pass them over in silence, to tell of an event which suddenly put an end to the peaceful life I was leading amongst the ants.

One evening I was barricading my door as usual for the night when Meg came in, and without prelude observed, with an air of mystery,

'We are going to war.'

'What?' I cried, 'to war! And with whom?'

'With the neighbouring republic.'

'And what is the *causa belli*?'

'O, a mere question of feeling. It seems that the populations of both states have increased greatly, and that the wood has grown too small for them; frontier squabbles are of daily occurrence. We have not troubled ourselves about it hitherto, but the insolence of our neighbours is beginning to exceed all bounds, and our forbearance is taken for fear. Well, to be brief, this morning a party of the enemy made an inroad on our territory, and in trying to repulse them our people, who were not in full force, were obliged to retreat in disorder. They say there are several killed and a great many wounded.'

'Well, and what then?'

'We have decided on war. There is a council being held in the public hall at this moment. There is some little opposition, there always is; but the majority are for the immediate commencement of hostilities, and our armies will probably march to-morrow morning.'

'You say the matter is now under discussion.'

'That is to say, the forms of discussion are being gone through, that we may seem to consider the arguments of dissentients, but war is virtually decided on.'

'Is the discussion public?'

'Of course it is. Would you like to be present?'

'Very much.'

'Well, then, follow me.'

Meg led the way and I followed her, feeling no little curiosity to

see a council of ants with my own eyes. After going through several passages we reached the entrance to the public hall, which I had been in on the first night of my arrival in the ant-hill.

The greatest excitement prevailed. Here and there groups of disputants were eagerly discussing the question of peace or war. Suddenly an ant demanded permission to make a speech, and silence was enforced.

'It is the leader of the opposition,' whispered Meg to me.

'Fellow-citizens,' cried the orator, 'none amongst you can accuse me of loving our republic less than another, no matter whom, but, before embarking on so terrible a venture as the step you contemplate, it will be well for us to take counsel together. If war be indeed inevitable, I shall set you all an example of devotion, and you will see me fighting in the foremost ranks.' ('Hear, hear!') 'But before taking any such extreme measures let us consider whether the offences of our neighbours really call for chastisement with the sword; let us see if matters cannot be amicably arranged. I am afraid that we have shown ourselves too susceptible.' (Interruptions.) 'I fear, I repeat, that we have shown ourselves too susceptible.' ('No, no!') 'There have been, it is true, a few skirmishes on the frontier, but they are, we know, now and then of daily occurrence; they have never yet led either us or our neighbours to plunge into a general conflict. The affair of yesterday has been made too much of, it has assumed an undue importance, and I think that if a remonstrance couched in courteous terms were addressed to our neighbours they would promptly render us that satisfaction which we have a right to demand, and we

should avoid the terrible scourge of war.'

At these words a great tumult began in the assembly. All the ants talked at once, and there was such a hubbub that it was impossible to hear oneself speak. At last, however, the noise subsided a little, and another ant ascending the platform demanded silence, and spoke in the following terms:

'Dear fellow-citizens, I am as devoted to our republic as the ant who has just been addressing you, but my devotion is of a different kind. I wish to see you all zealous for the national honour' (Cheers.) 'True, I love peace, and I should merit universal execration if I advocated a war without due cause; but is it such a war as that that we propose declaring to-day? It is not we who have given provocation to our neighbours, it is they who by their daily insolence have driven us to bay.' ('Hear, hear') 'We are told that a courteous remonstrance will be enough to insure the maintenance of peace; but do you know, fellow-citizens, how such a courteous remonstrance will be regarded by those to whom it is addressed? It will be looked upon as a disguised apology' (excitement); 'yes, as an apology. Do you wish us to send a deputation to our neighbours charged with an apology? Answer me, do you wish it, or do you not?'

At this a positive yell of fury echoed through the hall. The ant who had advocated peace had gradually approached one of the doors as his opponent spoke, and at the last word he realised that it was time for him to take himself off, which he did without an instant's delay. Some of the most excited of the ants began looking everywhere for him, that they might tear him to pieces.

'You were right,' I observed

to Meg. 'It was a mere form to let the leader of the opposition speak. It is evident that here, as elsewhere, the advocates of violent measures have it all their own way with the masses. They have but to bring out a few high-sounding phrases, such as the "honour of the republic," "zeal for the national dignity," "revenge for an unpardonable insult," and so forth, to crush down those who try to get a hearing for the cold and measured language of reason. I see that war is inevitable. What do you suppose will be the result?'

'Who can tell? War is but a game of chance. Our troops are brave and numerous, but those of the enemy are not less brave, and, I believe, more numerous than ours. I believe they are as anxious for war as we are, but they have managed to make us declare it, so that they may be able to proclaim us to be the aggressors. It's an old manoeuvre which always answers.'

After the second orator's speech the opposition had no chance of making itself heard. It would have been dangerous in the general excitement even to pronounce the word peace. The partisans of war had the people on their side, and although the whole burden of it would fall upon the latter, they rushed into it as blindly as common cockchafers, which are of all insects the very giddiest.

'Friend Cricket,' I said to myself, as I went back to my room, 'this is a fine lesson for you if you ever become king of the ants. You will know how the masses are swayed. A few telling attitudes and gestures, sonorous periods, empty but high-sounding words, ready-made phrases, always the same, not forgetting the judicious and appropriate introduction of a few shakes, an occasional

tremolo, and of the final C. If with all that you can't make your subjects follow you blindfold, you're no true cricket, and you're unworthy to reign.'

I slept but little that night. The whole ant-hill was in a commotion, and its inhabitants were perpetually running backwards and forwards in the passages. The marching regiments were doubtless being passed in review, that the campaign might open with daybreak.

Quite early in the morning Meg came to fetch me.

'Our troops are on the eve of starting,' she said; 'scouts have already been sent on to reconnoitre the enemy.'

'Do you suppose the enemy is aware of the expedition to be sent against him?'

'Not a doubt of it. He has his spies, who keep him informed of everything which goes on here.'

'How many men are there in your expeditionary force?'

'About two thousand; but as soon as the wood is reached the army will divide: one half will remain behind as reserve, and



only a thousand soldiers will march to meet the enemy.'

'To what corps do you belong, Meg?'

'O, I remain here; my age relieves me from active service.'

As we were talking some ants came up and held a whispered conversation with Meg.

'They wish me to ask you to accompany our troops,' she said, turning to me.

'As their leader?'

I bit my lips as Meg looked at me in surprise. I had foolishly let out my secret hopes.

'No,' she said; 'to make music for them to march to.'

'Hem, hem!'

'You really must not refuse, they rely upon you to encourage the soldiers.'

'Must I go to the scene of action?'

'You may as well. There's no need, though, for you to take part in the battle, and you remain in the rear whilst the fighting is going on.'

'I should prefer that certainly.'

Meg was here called out, but she soon came back, saying,

'They are waiting for you; the army is about to march.'

'But I have had no breakfast.'

'Never mind that; you will be made. You will be taken care of some food when the first halt is made.'

I set out, preceded by Meg, for one of the entrances of the ant-hill. To say that I was happy in my mind would be to tell a lie. I did not at all relish the prospect of being involved in a squabble such as that about to begin. It is true I was not obliged to take an active part in the struggle; but if I had to keep near the combatants I might at any minute be surrounded by the enemy, made prisoner, and perhaps murdered.

Once outside the ant-hill I was struck by the scene its environs presented. The ants in immense numbers were gathered about it, awaiting the signal for departure.

When I appeared a great silence fell upon them all, and every head was turned towards me. They evidently knew what office I was to hold.

With becoming gravity I climbed to the top of the ant-hill, and when there I paused for a few minutes to tune myself to the occasion.

It was for me to awake the patriotism of my audience, to extol its courage, to inflame it against the enemy, and finally to wind up with a thrilling flourish of trumpets. All this had to be done through the medium of chromatic scales and slakes; but they say that music admirably expresses all the emotions of the soul, and that there are times when it advantageously takes the place of words.

My song must have been worthy of its subject, and I have expressed all that I have said above, for it roused in them noble enthusiasms

amongst the ants. When I had brought out the final C, I heard cries from amongst the crowd of 'Long live the cricket!' and these cries were not repressed. It was a good omen for the future. After all, this war might promote my interests. I must watch events, turn everything which occurred to account, make opportunities for my own advancement—in a word, take Time by the forelock, that was all I had to do.

I was asked to take the head of the army, which I did at once, mentally resolving, however, to make some excuse for slackening my pace and letting the troops pass on before me when we should be near the enemy. It seemed to me that it was my duty not to risk in the chances of a battle a life to which a great interest might possibly be some day attached.

I was reflecting thus as I performed a war-march, and the ants in four columns followed me silently.

We soon reached the borders of the wood, and a halt was made for breakfast. Nearly all the ants had brought provisions with them, carrying them in their mandibles. Meg had not forgotten me, and I saw some soldiers approaching me, painfully dragging along a huge piece of white sugar which had been reserved for me. I mentally thanked my old friend as I did justice to the meal provided for me.

As I was eating I listened to the conversation going on about me.

The following dialogue between an old ant and a young recruit particularly interested me. The former had taken part in the expedition against the black ants, and she spoke with the authority of age and experience.

'You know, conscript,' she

said, 'I don't want to cavil at my superiors, but the fact is this campaign is being badly managed; and I am very much afraid it will be a failure. Who would have dreamt yesterday that we should be opening hostilities at dawn to-day? We rush to arms without warning, without preparation, without allies of any sort or kind, when we might so easily have secured the cooperation of the amazon ants. Then we march at haphazard, without knowing when or where we may meet the enemy. They say our leaders have a grand plan of action, but I'd bet one of my legs that they have no more plan than I have. Did you see any scouts start before us? I didn't, not a single one, and I was wandering about the ant-hill all night. I'd risk a second leg that each has left the other to see to that precaution, and that nothing has been really done.'

'According to you, then, old Gibs, we are not going to march direct upon the enemy's ant-hill?'

'March direct upon the enemy's ant-hill? Do you suppose the enemy is going to allow himself to be beaten just to cover you with glory? We are by no means secure of victory, and we shall need all our resources to come out of the affair creditably. In our last struggle with the black ants we had no little difficulty in conquering them, and what we did then was nothing to the work before us now.'

'You old people see everything in a gloomy light, does our courage, our proved courage, count for nothing?'

'O, courage is all very well as far as it goes, but what's the good of it when an army is not well commanded? And we are badly commanded—I feel it, I know it.'

'You feel it, do you? That's always the way with the old folks.

I daresay you think now that if you were our leader everything would be better managed.'

'You talk as young people do; they always are and will be presumptuous, inconsiderate, and unsuspicious. But you'll see, you'll see.'

'Yes, we shall see. Look now how quiet everything is in the wood. Not an enemy in sight. It's my belief now that we shall surprise them and fall upon them before they know where they are.'

'So that's your opinion, is it, conscript?'

'It's the opinion of the whole army.'

'So much the worse for the army. Now I think we shall be surprised ourselves presently.'

'A truce with your forebodings, prophetic of evil! Why, look there, there are the scouts coming back. Who said none had been sent?'

A few minutes later a rumour was circulating in the army that the scouts had explored the wood and had seen nothing suspicious. They had, it was true, caught sight of a few of the enemy, but they seemed to be there quite by accident, and had retreated hastily on their approach.

Old Gibs shook her head, but as the order to resume our march was given at that moment I did not hear the conclusion of her remarks.

As Meg had said, two of the four columns of which the army was composed halted at the entrance to the wood. The other, numbering some thousands, advanced under cover of the bank.

On this side the wood consisted of several different kinds of trees, beetles predominating. The ground, which was either bare or overgrown with moss, offered but few impediments to our march, so that we advanced rapidly. I reman-

eil at the head of the army and between the two columns, going on playing the war-march I had struck up when we started. Presently, however, I gradually slackened my pace, so as to allow the heads of the columns to precede me. The most profound silence continued to reign around us, and no sound awoke the echoes but that of my music.

We had now been marching a long time, and there was no sign of the enemy. Had the young conscript been right? I wondered. Had old Gibs been talking nonsense, as he had implied? I was beginning to think she had.

A hollow path now lay out before us, probably a continuation of the one I have already mentioned. It was of considerable width, and bounded on either side by very steep banks. To cross it, it would be necessary to go down the bank on our side and ascend the one opposite to us. The latter looked very rugged, and was surmounted by the projecting ridge beneath which I had taken refuge lower down in the storm a few days ago. No enemy was to be seen on the other side. Old Gibs, who now happened to be near me, again suggested to her companions that it would be well to climb a tree and reconnoitre the bank opposite to us before scaling it; but she was only laughed at for her prudence, to which another name was given, and she did not venture to insist.

The two columns of ants descended the bank like a double torrent, and in a moment the hollow path was alive with hurrying troops. I paused on the projecting brow of the bank looking down upon the ravine, waiting to cross it in my turn, till the transit should have been effected by the bulk of the army.

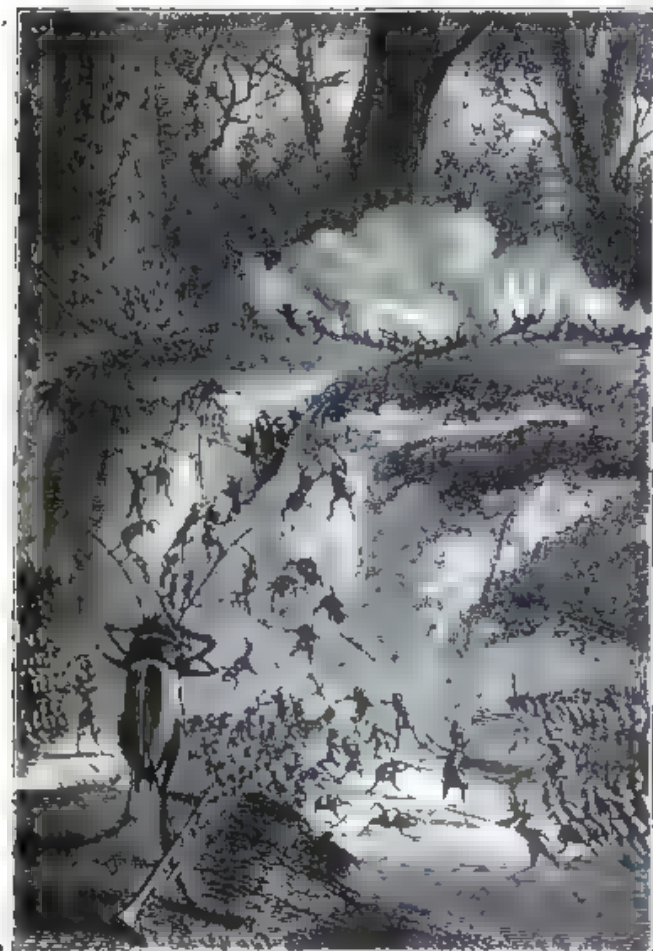
The ascent of the opposite bank was quickly effected, and soon the whole army was drawn up beneath the second ledge already mentioned. The perpendicular wall presented no obstacle to the ants, who immediately scaled it; but, having gained the summit, they found themselves stopped by a clump of heather, the hanging roots of which formed an insuperable barrier even to them.

Some little confusion now occurred in the ranks, owing to the precipitate descent of those who, pressing on in advance, had recognised the impossibility of further progress in that direction. From the commanding position I occupied I could see a kind of hollow in the otherwise inaccessible bank, by which the ascent to the plateau could be made by a few at a time. I was about to point out this ravine to our people when some of them perceived it, and, entering it, called to the others to follow them. The bulk of the army then halted, and a file of ants, looking like a black thread, entered the pass, which was too narrow to admit of many at once.

At the end of half an hour some four or five hundred appeared to me to have passed through—that is to say, rather less than half the effective force. At this moment I noticed a little faltering in the column in the pass, then a retrograde movement, and a little later I distinctly saw those of the ants who had gained the plateau roll down upon those behind them. What could be the meaning of this? It was soon explained. Whilst the regiments nearest the ravine were running to ascertain the cause of the interruption of the ascent, I suddenly saw the patch of heather already referred to as forming the crest of the opposite bank become alive with

ants. I could distinctly see them struggling with each other, and some of them fell back into the path where that part of the army which had not been able to reach the plateau remained motionless. We had fallen into an ambuscade,

and our forces were cut in half. I now heard a dull noise from the plateau, where the struggle was probably going on with considerable slaughter; but, being on a somewhat lower level, I could see nothing of what was happening.



Many ants were still attempting to ascend the ravine, but they could not succeed. It was evident that some obstacle had been placed in it which it was impossible for them to surmount. Those which fell back from the heather

on to their companions were immediately surrounded and questioned, and it was evident that the replies elicited were of a terrifying nature, for they at once produced the greatest agitation amongst the expeditionary forces.

I saw the ants, as if seized with a sudden access of fury, clutch at the vertical wall beneath which they were massed, and struggle to scale it, only, alas, to fall back upon each other, balked by the impassable barrier of heather. Deeply moved, I was eagerly watching the scene, of which not a single detail escaped me, when my attention was suddenly called in another direction.

I have already said that from the position I occupied I commanded a view of one part of the hollow path which wound in such a manner as to admit of my seeing a long way down it on either side. At the moment referred to above I saw a dense column of ants advancing in good order from the left, and at the same time another body appeared on the right. I shouted in a shrill voice to warn our people of the threatening danger, and made signs to them to fall back towards me; but, absorbed in their vain efforts to scale the bank, they either did not see or did not understand me.

Meanwhile the two converging columns rapidly approached each other. At last they were noticed, and I saw our soldiers leave the wall they had been vainly attempting to scale, and, in the presence of a visible enemy, regain the calmness and coolness they had for the moment lost. Their new dispositions were rapidly made; and, dividing into two parties, they prepared to meet the

onslaught of the attacking columns with a vigorous repulse. The combatants all belonged to the same race; and in the hand-to-hand struggle which ensued, the two parties were so mixed together that I was at a loss to understand how they could distinguish friends from foes.

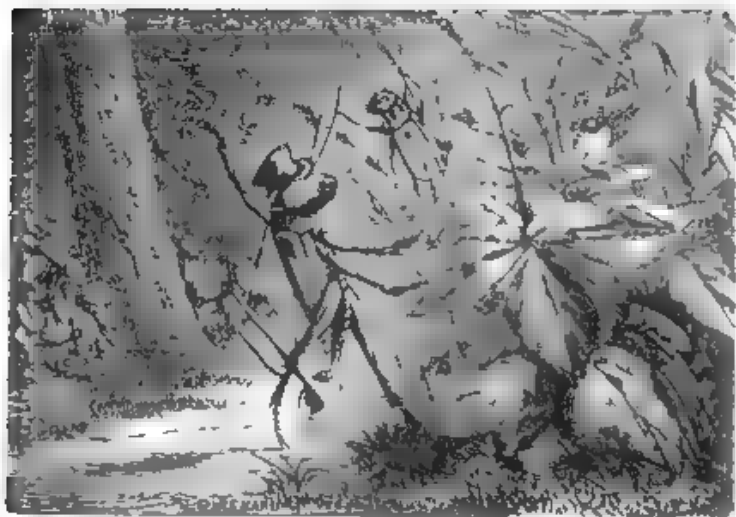
As to what would be the issue of the battle there could be not a shadow of doubt. The enemy's columns each numbered some thousands of troops, and it was impossible that our army, reduced to five hundred at the most, could long sustain so unequal a combat. In spite of their courageous resistance, they must soon be overpowered. The noise from the hollow path now drowned that from the plateau, and I could no longer make out whether the struggle on the latter was over or still going on.

The battle had lasted for some time with incredible slaughter when I suddenly saw an ant running towards me, whom I took for one of our people.

'Run, Cricket!' she cried eagerly—'run, and summon the reserve corps from the borders of the wood: you will go faster than I shall. Tell them to hasten up; things are going against us.'

With that she left me to return to the battle; whilst I, leaving the scene of carnage, where I could do nothing for my friends, bent my steps to the place where we had left the reserve corps.

(To be continued.)



THE CURIOUS ADVENTURES OF A FIELD CRICKET.

CHAPTER XXI

A TERRIBLE ACCLASATION

After having run for about an hour, I paused. The clearing could not be far off, and it seemed to me that I ought to have reached it by this time. Escorted by the ants to the scene of action, I had not thought to note the features of the landscape to help me on my way back, for of course I had never dreamt of returning alone. I had suddenly come to a place where nothing grew but fir-trees. I was certain we had not passed it in the morning.

There was no longer any room for doubt. I had lost my way. Feeling very uneasy, I caught sight of a snail, which was slowly crawling over some moss hard by. I ran up to him, and asked him if he could direct me to the ant-hill, but at the first words I spoke the stupid mollusc drew himself into his shell, and I could not induce him to come out again.

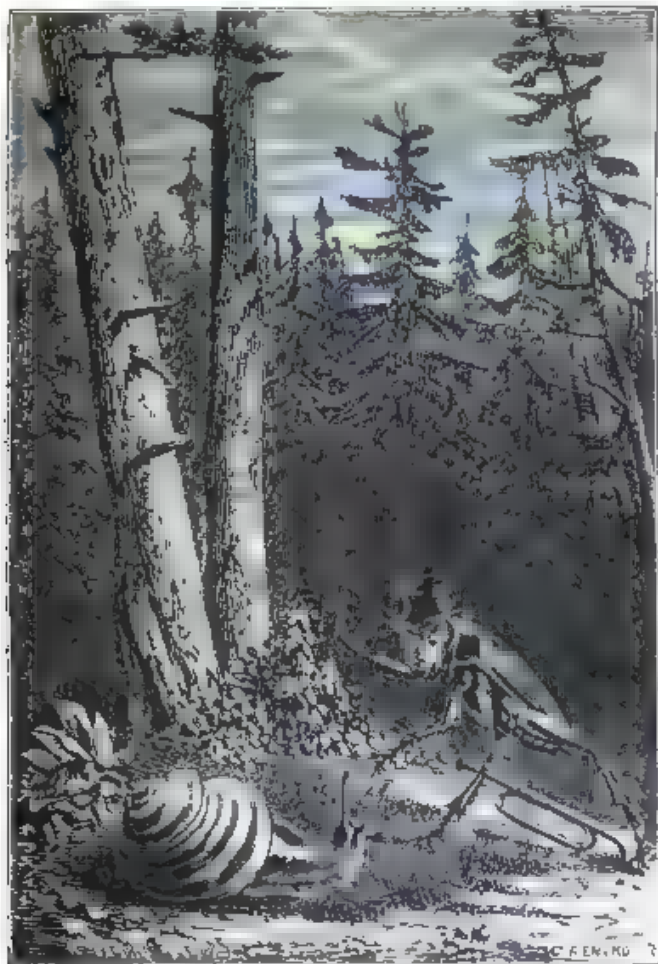
What was I to do? The fir-wood did not seem to be of any

great extent, but how was I to know which way to turn to get into the right road? Should I go to the right or to the left? It was impossible to know which was correct.

I decided on the left. Some insects of whom I made inquiries could tell me nothing definite. Some of sluggish habits had never even heard of the ant-hill, others knew it, but gave me contradictory directions. Others, again, asked which ant-hill I wanted, as there were two in the wood. I did not know which any more than they did, but I explained that the one I was seeking was in a clearing at the foot of two beeches. At that I was told that they were both in a clearing; and as for whether one of them was or was not at the foot of two beeches, they did not know, for they had not noticed. At last, after much wandering to and fro, I was fortunate enough to meet an ant-beetle.

I told him of the awkward position in which I found myself, and explained why I was so anxious to find my way. He pointed at out to me, and even offered to

accompany me; but as he could not walk very fast, and the directions he gave me were most precise, I thanked him for his courtesy, and resumed my journey,



hoping this time to reach my goal.

I was worn out with fatigue, and it was beginning to get dark when I reached the clearing.

Having rapidly considered my bearings, I ran to the spot where the reserve corps had been stationed in the morning, not, if the

truth be told, with any great hope of finding it, nor at all shutting my eyes to the probable consequences of the delay in giving the message with which I was intrusted.

The thought that I had been the involuntary cause of the delay filled me with regret.

Why had I not taken the ant on my back who had been

sent to me by our distressed troops? She would have directed me. But one cannot think of everything, and being almost off my head when I started on the spur of the moment, I never considered that, as I was not in the habit of going about in the wood, I might lose my way and fail to arrive in time.

At last I reached the spot where we had halted. It was deserted.

There was nothing left for me to do but to return without further delay to the ant-hill, which I did forthwith.

The doors were being barricaded when I arrived, and the guards seemed surprised to see me returning alone. My first words were to ask for news of the army. None had been received, and now that I had come I was expected to bring tidings. There was great uneasiness, I was told, as to the fate of the expeditionary force. In a few words I imparted all I knew, and in an instant the ant-hill was in a state of ferment.

I had to repeat my story some twenty times, as I was dragged to the public room, where a consultation was to be held at once.

There, as may be imagined, the excitement was intense, and all manner of conjectures were hazarded as to the fate of the army, each one expressing his own opinion, and the hubbub became deafening. The prevailing idea, however, was that the battle had lasted until nightfall, and that the army was now in full retreat on the ant-hill. Had it been beaten? Had it been victorious? Was the retreat, if retreat it indeed were, being made in good order, or was it a rout? Then came endless suggestions. Some proposed that messengers should be sent out to obtain news, others, and these were in the majority,

thought it would be better to wait, seeing that nothing would be gained by early intelligence: if the army were beaten, they should hear it soon enough; if it were victorious, the expeditionary corps would be back very shortly, in any case nothing could be done before the morning: it would be best therefore to wait patiently.

The latter opinion carried the day. I asked for Meg; but no one could tell me where she was. After partaking of food—of which I stood urgently in need, for I was literally dying of hunger—I went back to my room, to rest from my fatigue whilst waiting for news.

I was soon sound asleep.

Towards the middle of the night a slight noise at my door woke me. Some one was cautiously calling to me. I raised one of the beams forming the door of my room, and saw Meg, who came in, looking very anxious.

She shut the door carefully, and then coming up to me she whispered,

‘Cricket, I have come to warn you that your life is in danger here; you must fly without delay.’

These words roused me completely.

‘What do you say?’ I cried. ‘My life is in danger.’

‘Yes.’

‘And why?’

‘This is why: you must know that a first body of troops has been almost entirely destroyed. This catastrophe is the result of the too-tardy arrival of the reserve corps, which was not summoned in time. You were charged with that important mission, and you know how badly you performed it. You are accused of treason.’

‘Treason! I a traitor! Why, Meg, you know I lost myself in the wood. I have made no secret of that.’

'O, of course not; that's your version of the matter; but unfortunately it does not tally with the general opinion. I repeat that you are suspected of treason.'

'But I am no traitor, Meg. I have spoken the truth. I will defend myself.'

'Don't attempt it, Cricket. my people's blood is up; your explanations would not be listened to. Is it any good to reason with a mob? It might be all very well if a trial were granted to you. But there will be no trial. They will begin by murdering you.'

'But who can have brought such an accusation against me?'

'Who, indeed? You see you have enemies here. Do you remember what I told you?'

'O yes, I remember about the bombardier beetle affair. Botheration take the stupid creature! I wish I had never met him or made my unlucky exclamation. It's not the first time that acting on impulse has got me into trouble. What am I to do?'

'Fly, as I have already told you.'

'Fly! I daresay. That's easier said than done. The colony being lit up is all against me. If I show myself in the streets—'

'If you show yourself in the streets you will inevitably be put to death. The streets are full of people. You can hear that from here. In view of the approach of the enemy, the eggs, larvæ, and pupæ are being brought down into the basement as quickly as possible. The guards have been doubled at all the doors, which are closed in preparation for a siege; there is no escape for you through them.'

'Then I am lost!'

'No, not yet. One course is left to you.'

'What is that? Tell me quickly!'

'You are able to burrow in the earth.'

'Yes; but not in wood. And we are on the trunk of a tree.'

'That's true. But, by a lucky chance, this room is on the outer borders of the ant-hill; and by digging horizontally in the wall opposite the door, you will reach the virgin soil. No road has been made on that side.'

'What a happy chance! I'll set to work at once. You'll go with me, Meg?'

'Impossible. If I were absent when your flight is first discovered, I should certainly be accused of complicity with you, and it would soon be all over with me.'

'But I may lose myself underground.'

'O, no, you won't. If you follow the instructions I give you carefully, you will easily escape.'

'Say on, then.'

'You must pierce a horizontal passage opposite that door. When you get beyond the ant-hill—that is to say, when you have gone a distance equal to some fifteen or twenty times the length of your own body, which you can easily calculate—you must direct your course upwards. You can't fail to reach the surface of the ground, and you had better manage not to arrive there till to-morrow night.'

'O, it will take me quite that time to make my gallery. Will they not pursue me underground?'

'It's not very likely that they will. Throw the earth behind you as you advance. I'll take care to remove all traces of your work here. You will be supposed to have escaped by one of the doors, and you will be hunted for outside in the morning.'

'And when I get outside to-morrow night?'

'You will run away as fast as you can.'

'I shall lose myself again.'

'Call to me in a whisper; I'll take care to be within hearing.'

'Then good-bye, Meg; or rather, *au revoir*. Believe me, I am most grateful.'

'O yes, yes, I know all that; but don't waste time in talking. Set to work at once; we may be surprised at any moment.'

'One word more. Suppose I come to a stone?'

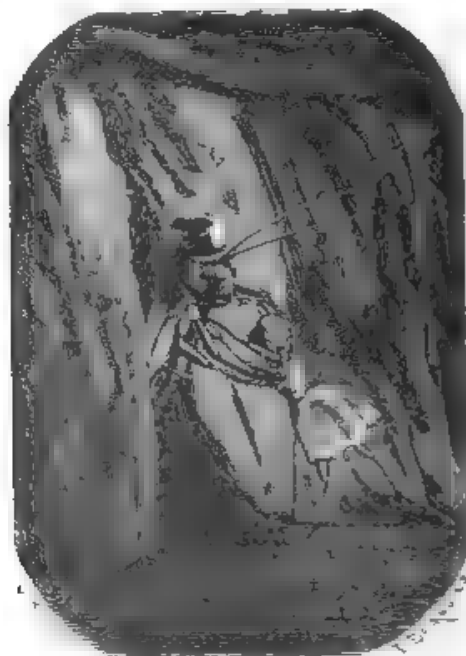
'That will be your look-out.

Go round it, only take care to keep in the right direction.'

'I'll try to.'

As I spoke I began to burrow, and the ground not being very hard I was soon buried to a depth of twice the length of my body. I flung the soil behind me, and Meg hastened to fill up the opening I had made; thus removing all trace of the mode in which I had made my escape.

'Good luck go with you!' she cried at the last moment; 'and good-bye till to-morrow.'



CHAPTER XXII

I ESCAPE, AND DECIDE THAT I HAVE HAD ADVENTURES ENOUGH.

I WAS now buried at a considerable depth and in complete darkness. I was thrown entirely on my own resources.

I had to burrow in a straight line, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left.

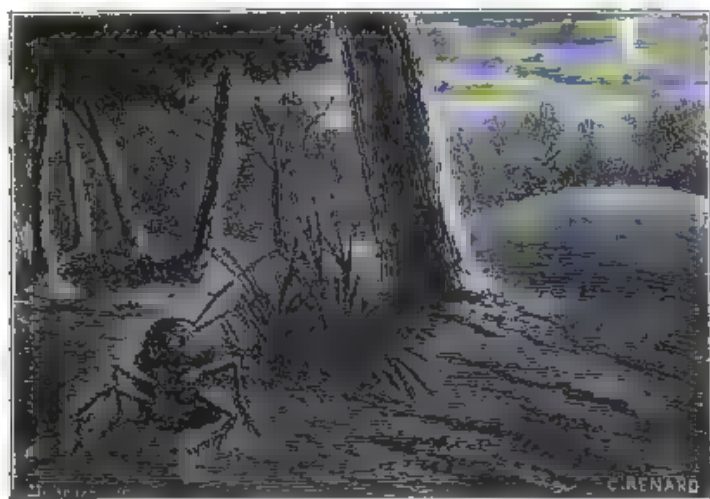
I set vigorously to work with my forefeet, taking care to burrow straight before me. No easy matter, I can tell you; for no one knows how difficult it is to follow a given direction without the aid of one's eyes.

As I crumbled the soil before me I flung it behind me, so that it was not exactly a passage I formed, but a kind of little square cell. I could not have gone back without turning round. I was obliged to continue to advance; and my chief fear was that I might come to some big stone, which would compel me to deviate from my course; in which case I should become confused, and run a risk of returning to the ant-hill, which it was so much to my interest to avoid.

Whilst I was busily digging

away with feet and jaws, I reflected thus:

'You see, Cricket, what has come of your ambitious dreams. You are obliged to flee like a malefactor from the town where you had hoped some day to reign. A few hours ago you were intoxicated with cries of "Long live the Cricket!" and the very voices which uttered them are now execrating you. O, the vanity of popular success! And what was the cause of this sad downfall? A thoughtless exclamation; an unlucky combination of circum-



stances. What ever induced you to applaud the prowess of that worthless bombardier beetle? The ungrateful wretch never gave you a word of thanks, and you made enemies who are having their revenge now. When will you learn not to act on impulse? Well, you have certainly had adventures enough now. If you get safe and sound out of this one, you will retire to some quiet spot, and spend the rest of your days far from noise and turmoil. You are not fitted for a life of excitement. Leave others to run about the

world. True happiness is to be found everywhere. There's no need to seek it painfully at a distance. It consists in being content with a little; in not craving after more than the necessities of life. And your wants are few, Cricket. You will divide your time between the culture of the arts and the contemplation of the beauties of Nature. To these you must henceforth limit your ambition.'

Several hours were spent in digging. I seemed to have made very good progress; but I began

to feel terribly cramped in my subterranean cavern. In spite of all my efforts, I could not so throw the earth I displaced in front as to make it occupy exactly its original position behind me, and the consequence was that I became more and more straitened for space. But for that, however, all went well. I was fortunate enough to have thus far met with no stone or other insuperable obstacle.

When I thought I had proceeded far enough in a horizontal direction to be beyond the limits of the ant-hill, I began to direct my course upwards; and then paused, partly to rest and partly to wait for the evening, as I must not arrive at the surface before night. I was getting very hungry, but it was of no use to think of eating then.

'Let's go to sleep,' I said to myself. 'Who sleeps, dines.'

And with that I fell asleep.

My sleep lasted a long time, and refreshed me greatly. When I woke I set to work again, and it seemed to me that the earth became softer, which proved that my rescue was nearly accomplished. A little later I was outside. It was night. At a short distance from me rose the ant-hill, silent and gloomy as it had been on the evening of my first arrival.

'Meg,' I murmured in a low voice—'Meg!' I waited a few minutes; then I repeated in a louder key, 'Meg.'

It then made out an ant advancing cautiously through the darkness. She had but one antenna. It was Meg.

'O, it is you, Cricket,' she said. 'It's all quiet now. Come out, and run as quickly as you can under that heather. I will follow you.' I did as she suggested, and she soon joined me beneath the tuft of heather under which I had

taken refuge for the time. 'Here you are, safe and sound, then,' went on Meg. 'Your underground journey went off well!'

'It couldn't have gone off better,' was my reply 'but I am dying of hunger.'

'I provided for that. Here is some sugar I brought for you.'

I hastened to appease my appetite; and whilst I was eating, Meg told me all that had passed during the day. I had not left my room a minute too soon the previous evening; for just after my escape, the ants had arrived *en masse* to punish me, my enemies having spread the report of my reputed treason. Their fury on finding my room empty was immense, but fortunately the way in which I had made my exit did not occur to them. They hunted for me everywhere, both in and about the ant-hill, but at last, tired out, they gave up the vain search, and the gravity of subsequent events had made them forget all about me.

In fact, very serious things had taken place. I learnt that the first body of troops had been cut to pieces, and almost completely destroyed; that the reserve corps, surprised at receiving no tidings of their comrades, had themselves marched in the course of the afternoon, and after a long tramp had met some fugitives, who had told them of the catastrophe which had occurred in the ravine. Lastly, that whilst they were deliberating as to what was to be done, the enemy surrounded them in their turn and cut them to pieces, as they had done their predecessors. A few ants, some fifty at the most, had escaped, and after wandering about in the wood nearly all night had regained the ant-hill.

'This morning,' added Meg, 'a second army, larger than the first,

set out for the frontier. Fighting has been going on without any definite result, although our forces have had to retire from the field of battle. The losses have been enormous on both sides. That is how things stand at present.'

'Shall you begin again to-morrow?'

'Without the slightest doubt.'

'But how will it all end?'

'I am very much afraid it will end badly for us. From what one of my friends, who took part in the



last battle, tells me, it must have been an awful struggle. Our troops behaved splendidly, but the enemy mustered in vast numbers. Every hour reinforcements arrived for them. They literally seemed to spring from the ground, to fall

from the trees, to be rained from the skies.'

'It strikes me that the best thing I can do now is to make off as fast as I can. Eh, Meg?'

'I quite agree with you, friend.'

'I can be of no use to you!'

'None whatever.'

'Then I'm off. You'll go a little way with me?'

'Yes, I'll see you to the hollow path: you'll be all right then.'

'Thanks; I shall be glad if you will, or I shall certainly lose myself again in this stupid wood, which I wish was at Jericho.'

'But when you cross the clearing,' added Meg, 'you must do so alone. We might meet a few late fugitives belonging to our ant-hill, and if I were seen with you—you understand?'

'O yes, I understand perfectly. You have only to follow me at a distance.'

'We might do better than that. You see that white trunk down there with the moonbeams shining upon it? It's a birch, and there's not another hereabouts. Go to it, and wait for me at the foot of it. I'll join you there.'

'All right,' I replied.

I set off in the direction indicated, taking care to avoid exposed places, and those too vividly lit up by the moon. On my way I had reason to recognise Meg's prudence, for I met an ant. The news that I was wandering about in the neighbourhood would therefore certainly be made known in the ant-hill. For myself, personally, I had nothing more to fear, for it was not to be supposed that the ants would leave home in the night to hunt for me; they would not have a chance of success if they did.

Arrived without difficulty at the foot of the birch, I there awaited Meg, who soon joined me.

We walked for some little distance without speaking. We had to make frequent detours to avoid stumps of trees, clumps of bracken, tufts of grass, and of other plants. But for Meg I should never have found my way out of the labyrinth; but she was quite at home

in the wood, and in spite of the darkness she advanced with the greatest confidence. All was silent and peaceful. I did not feel as nervous in the wood as I had done when I first entered it. That was doubtless the result of my feeling of security after the long hours of anxiety and fatigue I had had to go through.

We reached the hollow path without any adventures.

'I must leave you here,' said Meg; 'if you follow the hollow path you will get out of the wood. Where are you going to live?'

'I am quite undecided on that point,' I replied; 'but it will probably be in the strawberry-bed.'

'You will settle there permanently?'

'Yes, I think I shall; I have had enough of adventures. When I was underground I reflected very seriously, and I have resolved henceforth to lead the life of a hermit. My tastes incline me to a life of contemplation. The experiences of the last week have taught me many things, amongst others that there is no place like home. To-morrow I shall dig myself a comfortable little residence in some suitable locality, and I hope there to end my days in peace.'

'A delightful plan, truly; but are you not afraid of being dull all alone?'

'No, I don't think I shall be dull. I shall have plenty to think of for a long time. Remember what adventures I have had.'

'I tell you what,' laughed Meg; 'instead of thinking of them write them; then they may perhaps be useful to others.'

'Who can tell?'

'And now, friend, I must hasten back as quickly as I can. It is not for me to form plans for a peaceful life. Our positions are

also very different. I am one of a society, each member of which must contribute to the best of his or her ability to the common good. *Au revoir*, Cricket!

'To our next meeting, Meg!'

With that we separated. Shall I own that I felt deeply moved? But why should I not own it? The reader now knows me well enough not to be surprised at my agitation. I had known Meg but a few days, it is true; but in that short time she had given proof of sincere and ready friendship, in fact of positive devotion. And then the circumstances under which we had met led to as great an intimacy as if we had lived together for years. There are people who give their affections in return not for what they receive, but for the services they themselves render, and I am one of those people.

'Come, friend Cricket,' I said to myself, shaking myself and springing into the ravine, 'you are becoming quite a sentimentalist. It is the effect of the calmness of the night, the silence of the woods, and of the moonlight. Night-time still seems to affect your nerves, and in woods you are always either timid or sentimental. You know no medium. You had certainly better not settle in a wood.'

It would not have been prudent to follow the hollow path in the dead of the night, so I determined to go into the first crevice I came to, and remain there till the morning. The refuge I sought was soon found in the form of a projecting stone. I crept beneath it, and was soon wrapped in a peaceful dreamless sleep, such as I had not enjoyed for a long time.

At sunrise I resumed my journey, and arrived without accident

at the strawberry-bed. It was a fine morning, and I was in such good spirits that everything seemed *coulour de rose*. The incidents of the last few days, the emotions I had experienced when I first reached the ant-hill, the battle in which I had taken part, and my subterranean flight,—all seemed to me to be some terrible dream, and I was more than ever resolved henceforth to lead a calm and retired life.

I crossed the wild paddock to the rabbit-burrow, where I found everything as I had left it a few days previously. The stone beneath which I had taken refuge for several hours, and the gooseberry-bush which half overshadowed it, were both still there. But the spider was gone; only a few remains of her last web still hung upon the branches. What had become of her? Had she fallen a prey to some voracious bird? Had she perished in a struggle with a wasp, or had she again been the victim of a sphex? It was impossible to ascertain her fate.

Firefly had also disappeared.

I considerably enlarged the hole which I had already dug beneath the stone, and there I found the dead body of the staphylinus, which had been stupid enough to allow himself to be a second time surprised by the flood. As for the mole-cricket, I could obtain no tidings of her.

Meg came to visit me sometimes. She told me that after several battles, in which victory had been now on one side, now on the other, peace had been concluded, and that my supposed treason was forgotten.

The summer was succeeded in due course by the autumn, which gradually stripped the strawberry-bushes of their leaves and turned the foliage of the woods yellow.

Meg had once jokingly suggested that I should write my memoirs; later she alluded seriously to the matter; and it ended in my putting the idea into execution. I made

a collection of oak-leaves to serve as paper; and with a good deal of help from Meg I committed to writing the adventures you have just read.

THE END.

